

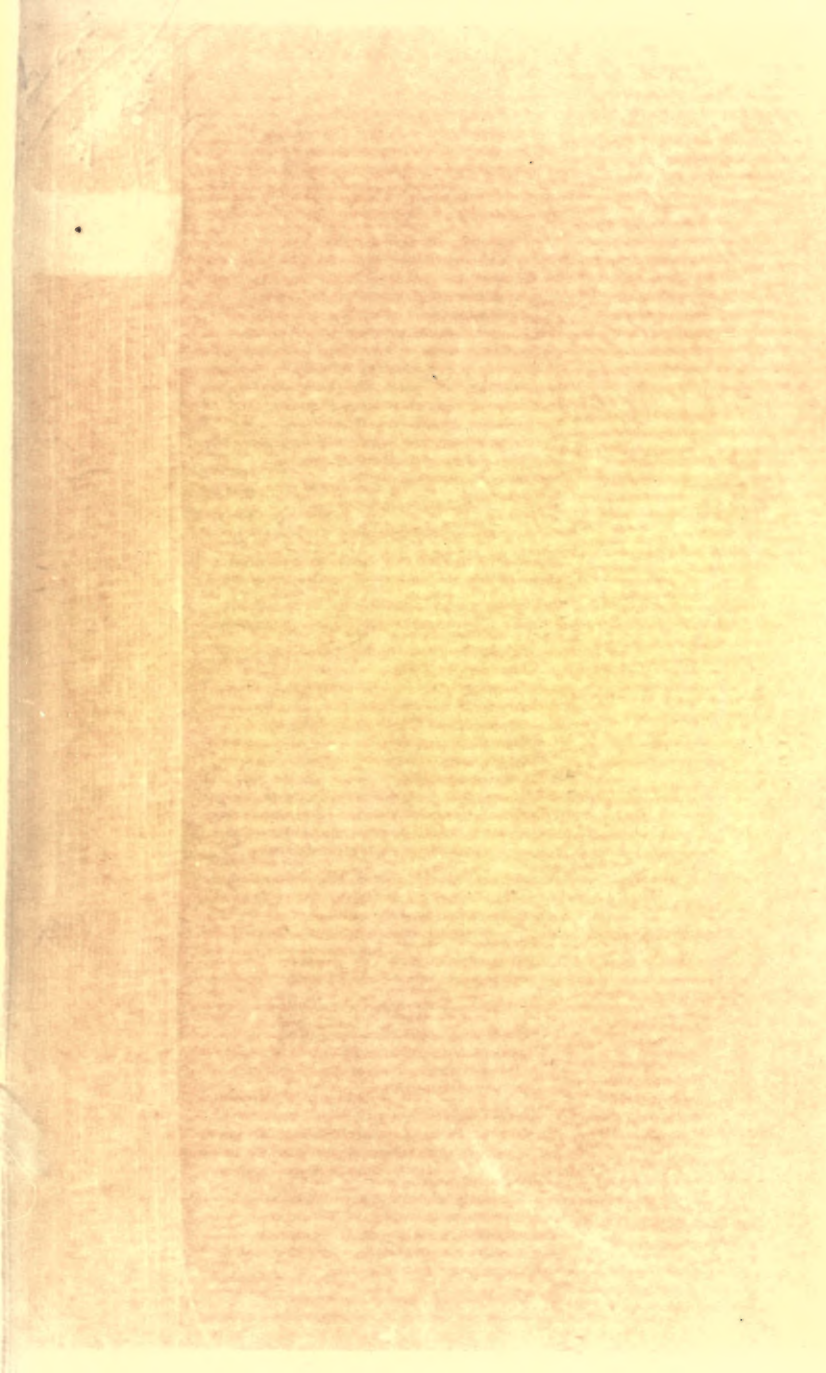
OLIVER, GOLDSMITH

THOMAS ASHE KING

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



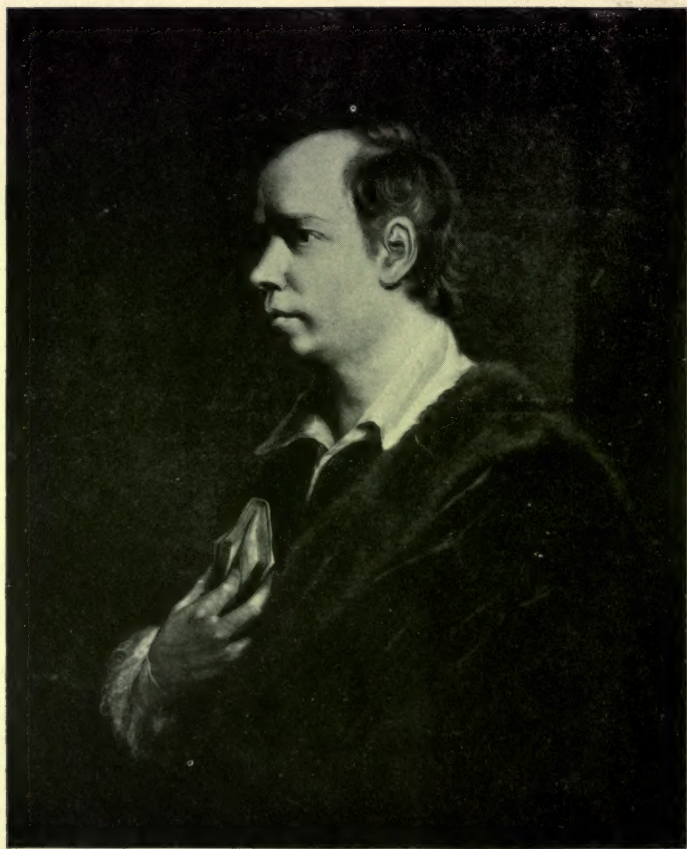
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OLIVER GOLDSMITH



Sir Joshua Reynolds, pint.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

BY
RICHARD ASHE KING

WITH A PORTRAIT

METHUEN & CO. LTD.
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INTRODUCTION

MY chief and perhaps sole qualification for undertaking this sketch of Goldsmith's life is that of an Irishman who, through long residence in England, has come to understand how the "Poor Poll" and "Inspired Idiot" idea of the poet became current in his own day and survives still to-day. There is no triter quotation from *Boswell* than that of Goldsmith's retort to the ridicule by Johnson of his contention that "It was difficult to make little fishes in a fable talk in character." When Johnson roared his ridicule, Goldsmith was nettled into the retort: "Why, Mr Johnson, this is not so easy as you seem to think; for if *you* were to make little fishes talk, they would talk like WHALES." Now, there is the complementary difficulty of getting whales to understand the prattle of little fishes, which explains much of the social contempt of Goldsmith's English contemporaries and biographers. No Irishman can live long in England without an occasional, if not continual, sense of his own colloquial frivolity. The well-balanced and well-ballasted British intellect cannot always follow that cock-boat dancing on every wave to every wind which an Irishman is pleased to call his mind. The following image is in old Fuller,

but I hope, if I venture to quote it, no Englishman will solemnly charge me with making, for the Irish intelligence, a claim of Shakespearian superiority.

“Many were the wit combats between Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, which two I behold like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war. Master Jonson, like the former, was built far higher in learning—solid but slow in his performances. Shakespeare, with the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about and take advantage of all winds by the quickness of his wit and invention.” Again, the average Irishman is seldom in earnest and never on oath in conversation, to the frequent bewilderment of the average Englishman. Often, indeed, an Irishman’s ideas rush out of his mind like the inhabitants of a house on fire—undressed, half-dressed, or grotesquely dressed in the first garments to hand; tumbling, too, one over another in their wild scurry: whereas the ordinary Englishman’s ideas issue forth from his mind like a Presbyterian household on a Sabbath morn, marching in due order and decorous dress solemnly to the kirk. I might add that the house on fire is often a tenement house packed to the roof with heterogeneous tenants, interrelated through association only; while the Presbyterian household is all of one family—small or large.

Thus the Irishman in England talks often too much, too fast, too lightly, too figuratively and too discursively; but such talk is never intended to be

taken seriously. If you insist upon handling a soap-bubble, its grace, lightness and iridescence disappears, and Englishmen sometimes insist on handling so conversational soap-bubbles. "Who are those, Mahony?" a Bradford man asked an Irish friend of mine, pointing to some sculptured heads that adorned the newly-built warehouse of a not over-reputable German Jew merchant. "If you ask *me*," replied Mahony, "I should say they were the forty thieves." Whereupon the Bradford man, after a careful count of heads, objected, "Why, Mahony, as there are only twenty-two heads they *can't* be the forty thieves." "Oh, the rest are inside," rejoined Mahony.

In addressing once a West Riding audience I happened to use in illustration the different marks made by the woodman on the trees in a neighbouring wood. "If you should go," I said, "through Courtney Woods, you will find some trees marked with a white ring, some marked with a red, and some blazed with an axe, etc., etc." As the meeting dispersed a gentleman came up to me in great excitement to say, "You ought to consider your words, sir, when you address an audience like that!" "Why, so I did." "How then, sir, could you come to say to those people, 'If you should go through Courtney Woods,' when you know as well as I that they are not *allowed* to go through Courtney Woods."

It will be said that such matter-of-fact folk may, of course, be met with here and there in odd and out-of-the-way corners of England, but that Goldsmith was

little likely to meet them in the very centre of intellectual light in London. But Goldsmith did meet with such matter-of-fact folk even there, and it is to the absurdity of such folk that we owe, in part, our idea of the absurdity of the poet. I shall take the three who have done much, perhaps most, to discredit Goldsmith's conversation—Boswell, Mrs Thrale and Cooke. Cooke, to be sure, was himself an Irishman, but a North of Ireland man, and therefore, to all intents and purposes a Scotsman, as, indeed, the following anecdote testifies. Sam Rogers, who knew Cooke in his old age, asked him once, "Mr Cooke, you were intimate with Goldsmith. What was your impression of him?" "Sir, he was a fool—he was a fool! The right word never came to him. If he gave you a shilling, and you handed it back to him saying, 'It was a bad one,' what do you think he would say, sir? He would say, it's as good a shilling as ever was *born*—*born*, sir, instead of coined; but 'coined,' sir, never entered his head!" Cooke's instance of Goldsmith's envy is no less inconsequent. "On hearing a ballad-singer sing his favourite air of 'Sally Salisbury' under the window of a room where I," says Cooke, "and some ladies were assembled, Goldsmith exclaimed with his usual vanity and envy, 'How miserably that woman sings!' 'Pray, doctor,' asked the lady of the house, 'could you sing it better yourself?' 'Yes, madam,' he replied, amidst a general titter of derision, 'and the company shall judge between us.' Hereupon," adds

Cooke, "he really did sing the song with so much taste and expression as to win the universal suffrages of the company!"

Let me now give Mrs Thrale's conclusive instance of Goldsmith's idiocy in conversation. "Poor Dr Goldsmith said once, 'I would advise every young fellow setting out in life to *love gravy*'—alleging for it perfectly seriously this reason that 'a glutton once disinherited his nephew because he disliked gravy!'" If Mrs Thrale had come upon this advice where it originally appeared—in Goldsmith's burlesque specimen of a magazine in miniature—it is possible that she might have understood it to be a joke. But Goldsmith had the unfortunate habit approved of, by the way, by both Cicero and Shakespeare, of "uttering a jest with a sad brow" to deepen the incongruity. "I am sure," said the "Jessamy Bride," "that on many occasions, from the peculiar manner of Goldsmith's humour and assumed frown of countenance, what was often uttered by him in jest was mistaken by those who did not know him for earnest." To what does the "Jessamy Bride" refer here? To a jest uttered by Goldsmith "with a sad brow," which Boswell stolidly comments upon thus:—"When accompanying two beautiful young ladies with their mother"—*i.e.*, the "Jessamy Bride," "Little Comedy" and their mother—"on a tour in France, Goldsmith was seriously angry that more attention was paid to them than to him." But the "Jessamy Bride" herself, who told the story again and again to the end of her long

life, never failed to add that Goldsmith was obviously jesting. Was it even necessary to make this explanation to anyone except Boswell? Here is the story. The "Jessamy Bride" and "Little Comedy," while standing with Goldsmith on the balcony of a hotel in France, excited the admiration of the officers of a passing French regiment by their beauty. Goldsmith, with the drollest affectation of jealousy, turned away, saying, with a shrug, "I too have my admirers elsewhere!" This when passed through the mind of Boswell, like gas subjected to tremendous pressure, comes out solid: "Goldsmith was seriously angry that more attention was paid to them than to him."

It may be said that such preposterous misunderstandings were possible only in the case of a man whose character and conversation generally lent themselves to the misrepresentation—that Goldsmith must have been notoriously the most envious and least reticent of men to have such incredible outbreaks of this base passion attributed to him. But even Boswell has supplied an answer to such a suggestion. Goldsmith, he says, was supposed to be the most envious of men only because he was the least reticent.

"In my opinion," he writes, "Goldsmith had not more envy than other people have, but only talked of it freely." The truth is an incontinence of speech which in Ireland betokens mere lightness of heart seems to Englishmen mere imbecility. Such

effervescence of geniality is specially distinctive of Irishmen of the Goldsmith type, whose spirits are always at either spring or neap tide. Gloomy when by themselves, in congenial company they rattle away, saying anything and everything that comes uppermost; while much of what comes uppermost is of no more substance than soda-water bubbles—in themselves nothing, but enjoyable for the exhilaration they indicate and diffuse. Such talk when served up in cold print might well taste like a heel-tap of yesterday's soda-water, which I once heard a waiter (who had drunk it in mistake for hock) describe to a fellow-waiter as "the nothingest thing he had ever tasted!" Now it is specially such specimens of Goldsmith's talk that Boswell, in his jealousy of "Goldy's" favour with Johnson, is at pains to collect and record. Though, however, he is almost as eager to expose Goldsmith as to exalt Johnson, he yet records so many *bon mots* of his rival in Johnson's affections as to suggest that Goldsmith's mistake was the winnowing of his wheat in the face of his company. The other members of "The Club" winnowed their wheat within, and what they produced, even if scanty, showed to more advantage than Goldsmith's contribution, lost in its bushel of chaff. If Goldsmith had had a Boswell always on the look out to record only his hits, how different would have been our conception of his talk! A Boswell "for the other side" makes all the difference in the world. Yet even a Boswell "for the other

side " admits that " Goldsmith was often very fortunate in his witty contests, even when he entered the lists with Johnson himself." Nor, again, does this Boswell " for the other side " lend countenance to the " Poor Poll " and " Inspired Idiot " exaggerations of Goldsmith's talk. " It has been generally circulated and believed," writes Boswell, " that Goldsmith was a mere fool in conversation ; but, in truth, this has been greatly exaggerated. He had no doubt a more than common share of that hurry of ideas which we often find in his countrymen and which sometimes produces a laughable confusion in expressing them." The truth is fairly expressed in Paoli's fine image, which, however, he applied to the works and not the words of the poet :—" Monsieur Goldsmith est comme la mer, qui jette des perles et beaucoup d'autres belles choses sans s'en appercevoir." He may have been in his talk as indiscriminating as the sea in what he flung out ; but among the random rack and rubbish were pearls and other treasures of price ; while, again, much that would appear to Englishmen mere random rack and rubbish, would be recognised by his fellow-countrymen for what it was—light jests " uttered with a sad brow," or such a genial effervescence of animal spirits as meant no more than the happy laughter of a child.

Boswell, it will be said, and justly, echoes only after all Johnson and the Club in his disparagement of Goldsmith's talk, and the disparagement of Johnson, Sir Joshua Reynolds and the Club gener-

ally is not so easily to be disposed of. Let me cite the trenchant summing up of Macaulay of the overwhelming evidence for the silliness of the poet's conversation.

"Whenever Goldsmith took part in conversation he was an empty, noisy, blundering rattle. On this point the evidence is overwhelming. So extraordinary was the contrast between Goldsmith's published works and the silly things he said that Horace Walpole described him as 'an inspired idiot.' 'Noll,' said Garrick, 'wrote like an angel and talked like Poor Poll.' Chamier declared that it was a hard exercise of faith to believe that so foolish a chatterer could have really written *The Traveller*. Even Boswell could say with contemptuous compassion that 'he liked very well to hear honest Goldsmith run on.' 'Yes, sir,' said Johnson, 'but he should not like to hear himself.'"

Now Johnson, unlike Boswell, loved Goldsmith; and Sir Joshua Reynolds, who also loved him, said, "I have frequently heard Goldsmith talk warmly of the pleasure of being liked, and observe how hard it would be if literary excellence should preclude a man from that satisfaction, which he perceived it often did from the envy that attached to it; therefore I am convinced Goldsmith was often intentionally absurd." In the face of such evidence, not impartial merely, but partial—since both Johnson and Reynolds loved Goldsmith—it would be absurd to deny that Goldsmith showed to disadvantage in conversation

in the Club or in the society of Johnson. But it must be remembered that Goldsmith always felt at a disadvantage in the Club and in the society of Johnson, and, again, that he was the most sensitive and self-conscious of men. "Goldsmith," says Miss Reynolds, "always appeared to be overawed by Johnson—always as if impressed by the fear of some disgrace"; and she adds, "and indeed well he might," and I also, and more emphatically, add "well he might!" One has only to realise what kind of man Goldsmith was, what kind of man Johnson was, and what kind was the conversation of Johnson either in or out of the Club, to understand how Goldsmith was disconcerted in Johnson's society. Johnson came into every society as a knight rides into the lists, expecting and meaning to fight, and to fight, to the death, not always scrupulously. "If Johnson's pistol misses fire," Goldsmith said, quoting from Colley Cibber, "he knocks you down with the butt end of it." Let us see for a moment what was the kind of conversation in which Johnson revelled. "Well, Sir Joshua," said Dunning, the lawyer, when he was the first to arrive at one of Sir Joshua's famous dinner-parties, where Burke, Johnson, etc., wrangled together, "well, Sir Joshua, and whom have you got to dine with you to-day? The last time I dined at your house the company was of such a sort that by G——! I believe all the rest of the world enjoyed peace for that afternoon!" This from a lawyer, who is not usually averse to contention,

seeing that lawyers live in and by it, like gold-fish in warm water. Again, one morning Johnson said to Boswell, "We had good talk last night, sir." "Yes, sir," replied Boswell, "you tossed and gored a good many people!" If Goldsmith had been, as he only too often was, one of the tossed and gored, it is easy to understand how a man of his morbid sensitiveness and self-consciousness would lose his head and lose his feet and flounder and blunder. An Irish judge told me that in the early part of the last century a Tipperary man was on trial for the manslaughter in a faction fight of a fellow-countryman in Nenagh fair. The skull of the man he had slain was produced in ghastly evidence against him, and when the judge asked him what he had to say why sentence should not be passed upon him, he pointed to the skull and said, "Yerra, my lord, what business had a man wid a shkull as thin as that in Nenagh fair!" And a man with a skin as thin as Goldsmith's had no business in such a hurly-burly as a Johnson symposium. "Goldsmith, sir," said Johnson, "should not be for ever attempting to shine in conversation. He has not the temper for it—he is so much mortified when he fails."

Then, the kind of conversation in a Club dominated by Johnson was not the kind in which Goldsmith excelled,—if he excelled in any kind, as I hope presently to show, or at least to suggest, that he did. Indeed, it was a kind that Johnson could not away

with. Let me take the *a fortiori* case of Edmund Burke, who by universal admission, by the admission of Johnson himself, was a supreme talker. "If Burke," said Johnson, "took shelter under an archway with a drover and talked to the man for the ten minutes the shower lasted, the drover would say, 'This is an extraordinary man!' Now, sir," added Johnson, who was too great to be mock-modest, "no one would say that of me." Again, when Johnson once was out of sorts, he said, "If I were to see 'Mond Burke now, it would kill me. That fellow calls forth all my powers." Yet how small is the place Burke fills in Boswell! Because, it will be said, Burke's serious talk was as much above the appreciation of Boswell as his great speeches were above the heads of the House of Commons. But of Burke's lighter talk what record is there in Boswell? Practically none; because Johnson thought Burke's lighter talk beneath contempt, and it was therefore considered negligible by Boswell. "When Burke," said Johnson, "does not descend to be merry his conversation is superior indeed. There is no proportion between the powers he shows in serious talk and in jocularity. When he lets himself down to that he is in the kennel." And in the kennel Boswell left him, because for him there was no appeal from Johnson's judgment. But there is for us. We may appeal to the judgment of a man who, in Johnson's own opinion, was as good a judge of conversation as any man in England—to that of Sir Joshua Reynolds. "Sir," said

Johnson once to Boswell, "I know no man who has passed through life with more observation than Reynolds." And of this man, whom nothing escaped, Johnson said on another occasion, "Reynolds was as good a judge of talk as he was of painting." But what is Sir Joshua's judgment of the jocularly which in the opinion of Johnson lowered Burke into the kennel? "I have often heard," says Sir Joshua, "Burke say in the course of an evening ten good things, any one of which would have served so-and-so" (mentioning a noted wit, probably Wyndham) "to live upon for a twelvemonth."

There was a kind of lighter talk in which Goldsmith also excelled, when in congenial society, that Johnson could not enjoy nor even endure. Even the unclubbable knight, Sir John Hawkins, who disliked Goldsmith, and whose dislike was almost as much to the credit of the poet as Johnson's and Reynolds' love, admits grudgingly that even in the hard-headed Scotch environment of Edinburgh Goldsmith was a great social success. "He was famous there in his student days," says Sir John, "for setting the table on a roar, though," the worthy knight adds in depreciation, "his motive was the unworthy one of an inordinate desire for applause." "Any learned celebrity he may have got in the schools," says Mr Forster, "paled its uneffectual fire before his amazing social success." And in a letter to Mr Forster the Rev. Edward Mangin writes:—"You rather intimate to my great gratification that you

do not conceive Goldsmith to have been understood by persons among whom he usually moved. I own I always thought he was not, and that his ordinary deportment and powers of conversation are grossly misrepresented by several who have talked and scribbled so flippantly about his peculiarities and blunders. We had formerly at Upham's Library (once Bull's) here in Bath an assistant in the establishment of the name of Croot. He had filled the situation for many years and was a clear-headed, observing old man. He often amused me and others with anecdotes of the distinguished individuals known to him as the frequenters of the library; and one day, speaking of Goldsmith, he told me that the poet was eagerly greeted on his entrance, and always conversed so pleasantly that he had behind his chair a crowd of respectful auditors and admirers."

One thing more I should like to say, that the supposed cause of Goldsmith's absurdity in conversation is non-existent. It is universally supposed that Goldsmith was muddle-headed and unready and needed time to get his ideas disentangled. As Macaulay puts it:—"Minds differ as rivers differ. There are transparent and sparkling rivers from which it is delightful to drink as they flow—to such rivers the minds of such men as Burke and Johnson may be compared. But there are rivers of which the water when first drawn is turbid and noisome, but becomes pellucid as crystal and delicious to the taste if it be suffered to stand till it has deposited a sediment; and such a

river is a type of the mind of Goldsmith. His first thoughts on every subject were confused even to absurdity, but they required only a little time to work themselves clear. When he wrote they had that time, and therefore his readers pronounced him a man of genius ; but when he talked, he talked nonsense and made himself the laughing-stock of his hearers."

This theory is easily disposed of. Goldsmith was at once the clearest-headed and readiest-witted of men. "Style," says Schopenhauer, "is the physiognomy of the mind and a safer index to character than the face. . . . An obscure or bad style means a dull or confused brain." But Goldsmith's style? One of its chief distinctions is its limpidity. Are we then to suppose that with Goldsmith alone his style was as distinct from his mind as, say, the voice of a *diva* is distinct from her artistic intelligence? No, you say ; but you are to suppose that Goldsmith's turbid mind took some time to run itself clear. When it had run itself clear, no doubt it was translucently clear, but the operation took time. It never took it, for it never got it, except in the composition of his poems, plays and novel. The headlong haste in which all Goldsmith's other work was written is something well-nigh incredible, when its ease, and order, and pellucid clearness are considered. "Ah, Mr Craddock," he said pathetically to an amateur author, who took months to polish a few pages, "ah, Mr Craddock, think of me that must write a volume every month!"

Let me give a list, and that an imperfect list, of all the work Goldsmith had in hand while he was writing his *History of England in a Series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son*. Besides his journalistic work, he edited *The Lady's Magazine*, translated a *Life of Christ* and *Lives of the Fathers* for *The Christian Magazine*, in addition to original contributions made to it; revised a *History of Mecklenburgh from the First Settlement of the Vandals in that Country*; compiled an Anthology under the title of an *Art of Poetry on a New Plan*; epitomised many of *Plutarch's Lives*; wrote a pamphlet on the Cock-lane Ghost; wrote a *Life of Beau Nash*; revised and enlarged *Wonders of Nature and Art*, a *System of Natural History* and *A Description of Millennium Hall*; and contributed largely to the *Martial Review, or General History of the Late War*—all this while writing a *History of England in a Series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son*.

And how were these extraordinarily popular "Letters" themselves composed? Cooke tells you. In the morning Goldsmith would study as much history in Rapin, Kennett or Hume as would serve for one Letter, noting the needful passages on a piece of paper, adding remarks of his own. At night he took up with him these books and notes to his bedroom and wrote the chapter with as much ease as anyone might write a letter to a friend. And these, I need not say, were far from the usual conditions under which Goldsmith wrote. He put off everything

to the last moment till, as his landlady in Green Arbour Court tells you, the bookseller [*i.e.* publisher] had to track him to his garret, lock there the door upon him and stand menacingly over him till he had reeled off the required amount of copy. Fancy any muddle-headed or unready man writing under such conditions swiftly, clearly and coherently! Yet under such conditions Goldsmith wrote swiftly, clearly and coherently—without pause or break, blot or correction. “Goldsmith’s style in prose,” writes Bishop Percy, “flowed from him with such felicity that in whole quires of his Histories, Animated Nature, etc., etc., he had seldom occasion to correct or alter a single word.”

So much for the conditions of Goldsmith’s hack work; and as to its quality, it was such that on its merits alone he was admitted to the rigidly exclusive Club, and on its merits alone Johnson pronounced him, “One of the first men we have now as an author.” When Johnson allowed Goldsmith this reputation, and when this reputation gained him admission to the Club, the poet had not published poem, play or novel. The truth is Goldsmith wrote, so to say, extempore—as fast as some men could speak extempore. And his extempore speeches—for in his early days in London he attended debating clubs—his extempore speeches were most of all notable for this very quality of lucidity. In the archives of “The Robin Hood Club”—a debating club of such distinction that there Burke himself first made his mark in London as a speaker—in the

archives of this club the following note was entered upon Goldsmith long before he had earned fame as a writer :—" A candid speaker with a clear head and an honest heart — though coming but seldom to the society."

Goldsmith, then, was neither muddle-headed nor unready, but he was easily and often disconcerted, and, when disconcerted, he lost his head. "Goldsmith," said Johnson, "is as irascible as a hornet," that is, he was exquisitely and even morbidly sensitive, and this morbid sensitiveness was played upon, or rather trampled upon, only too often by men whom his very sweetness of nature, which should have disarmed them, encouraged to the attack. "Goldsmith forgave injuries so readily," says Macaulay, "that he might be said to invite them"—surely a sentiment that smacks at once of servility and brutality! Brutes trample or gore to death the weak or the wounded only because they are weak or wounded, and slaves and cowards strike only where they are sure the blow will not be returned.

I must admit, then, that Goldsmith showed to disadvantage in conversation in the society in which he found himself most often, and in which Boswell most often met him, in London—in contentious society where every word was a blow, and in matter-of-fact society where every word was rung upon the counter to see if it was as good a shilling as ever was born—coined, I mean. But in society, where conversation was rather a game than a fight, and a game like Bad-

minton where the shuttlecock was light and feathered and flew high, he showed to advantage till those evil days came upon him when in his wretchedness he was poor company for anyone and poorest company of all for himself. While playing whist one evening at Sir William Chambers' Goldsmith suddenly, at a crisis of the game, sprang up, flung down his cards and rushed from the room. On his return Sir William cried irritably, "What the deuce is the matter, Goldsmith?" "It was that poor ballad-singer," replied Goldsmith, "she could hardly sing for her sobs"; and so he had hurried out to empty his purse for her relief. It was Goldsmith's own case in the days when Boswell met him most often. "Goldsmith's debts," says Cooke, "rendered him at times so melancholy and dejected that I am sure he felt himself a very unhappy man." "Goldsmith's disappointments," says Glover, "made him at times peevish and sullen and he has often left a party of convivial friends abruptly in the evening to go home and brood over his misfortunes." Misfortunes, you cry, brought on by himself, by his own reckless extravagance and improvidence. That, to be sure, is a soothing consciousness, when you have remorse from within helping misery from without to pull you down! No defeat is so certain as the defeat of that man who is his own enemy, since that enemy is always at the gate! And that enemy in these days overtook Goldsmith, broke his heart, broke his spirits, brought down his strength in his journey and shortened his days, and made him, as I say

poor company for anyone and poorest of all for himself.

To sum up then upon Goldsmith's social failure—which I have put first because it occupies the first place in nearly all English notices of the poet—it was really rather national than personal. It was the failure of an Irishman with an irrepressible, irresponsible, irreflective and fanciful tongue in contentious or matter-of-fact company. But, indeed, almost all the other faults and virtues of Goldsmith which to his English contemporaries and biographers seem eccentricities or idiosyncrasies, appear to his fellow-countrymen natural and national characteristics. What has been called "the eternal boyhood of an Irishman" manifests itself in the superlative degree in Goldsmith; and its superlative degree is childlikeness. He was child-like in his simplicity, in his trustfulness, in his vanity, and in the naïve expression of his vanity; child-like in his sacrifice of the future to the present, in his impulsiveness and improvidence; in his "knack at hoping" and in its complementary abandonment to despair. Perhaps from the standpoint of hard common sense many of his virtues leaned to failings' side; and Englishmen, being so circumspect themselves at once in speech and action, cannot readily sympathise with, nor even comprehend, child-like precipitancy of tongue and of hand. But to Goldsmith's fellow-countrymen much that seems silly in his talk and eccentric in his character appears natural and even rational. Hence no Irish-

man looks down upon Goldsmith from the height of a Mrs Thrale, of a Boswell, or even of a Prior, a Forster or a Macaulay. Standing on the same plane he sees his fellow-countryman nearer and knows him better; sympathises with weaknesses he shares himself, and understands the benumbing effect of a chill or uncongenial environment upon a singularly sensitive and self-conscious temperament. Only an Irishman long resident in England can understand the full significance of a passage in a letter from Goldsmith in London to his brother Henry in Ireland:—"I have contracted a hesitating, disagreeable manner of speaking."

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

CHAPTER I

SCHOOL DAYS

IF you reverse the apt and just compliment of Johnson's epitaph on Goldsmith you epitomise the history of his early years :—

“Qui nullum fere scribendi genus
non tetigit ;
Nullum quod tetigit non ornavit.”

There was hardly a profession which he did not attempt ; to none that he attempted did he attain. He tried the Church ; and failed. He tried the Law ; and failed. He tried Medicine ; and failed. Strange that a man who failed in all that he attempted in his youth should have succeeded in all that he attempted in his manhood. Stranger still, perhaps, that these failures of his early years should be in a sense the seeds of his later successes, and that because no writer ever turned his successive discomfitures to such fruitful and felicitous literary account as Goldsmith. All those years that seemed wasted, all those lost opportunities, all those futile attempts to enter profession after profession bore afterwards in his works abundant and imperishable fruit. I remember hearing Huxley in a lecture at Bradford explain that “the better bed coal” of that neighbourhood was

wholly composed of seeds of a gigantic fern which ages since and for ages had fallen seemingly wasted to the earth ; but which to-day, as coal, give light, and heat, and comfort to thousands of homes. Similarly all the seemingly waste years of Goldsmith's life have yielded the lambent light which shines in his works. This, it might be said, is not exclusively distinctive of Goldsmith, since every poet and novelist—Burns or Byron, Fielding or Smollett, say—has used up in his works the waste places and pieces of his life. "Experience," says Guizot, "is a torch that gives light only on the condition of burning," or as Shelley has it, poets "learn in suffering what they teach in song." But it seems to me more true of Goldsmith than of any other poet or novelist, because, in his works, both as a poet and as a novelist, he uses up, I might almost say, *only* his own experiences. So true is this that, if you were in doubt about the truth or falsehood of some of the adventures he describes in his letters to his mother or to his uncle, or in his conversations with his London friends, you have but to see whether or not these adventures are inwoven in one form or another in his works. If they are, you may be assured of their truth ; if they are not, you may be no less assured of their being but flights of fancy. When Goldsmith was professedly romancing he is often telling you his real adventures : when he is professedly telling his real adventures, he is often romancing. Everything that really happened to him—everything he really thought, felt, did, or suffered—is assimilated in his works. "No man," says Helps truly, "is so confidential as when he takes the whole world into his confidence," and Goldsmith was far franker indirectly

in his confidences to the whole world than he was directly in his confidences to his mother, his uncle, his brother-in-law or his friends. If, then, you wish to find the real Goldsmith, you will find him more faithfully reflected in his own works than in the accounts of his contemporaries or in the biographies of his biographers. And this Goldsmith of Goldsmith himself is far indeed from being the poor, irreflective, irresponsible creature of Boswell, Garrick, Mrs Thrale, or Horace Walpole. A pretence to know Goldsmith better than Mrs Thrale, Boswell or Garrick, who knew him personally and intimately in all his moods and in all his moments, may seem impudent; but after all, to know a man personally and intimately is the reverse of an advantage for judging him justly—if you dislike him. If you dislike a man, you will be always and only on the lookout for what you dislike in him; since hatred, like a wasp with a peach, fastens always on the little pitted, damaged and decayed spot—sees that only, settles only on that, recurs to that with fretful persistence.

Hence the life of Goldsmith has at once a direct interest in itself and a reflected interest through the light it throws on his works; since all his experiences were used and many of them were repeatedly used as *mémoires pour servir*, so to say, for his essays, his poems, his comedies and his novel. Reciprocally his works have a biographical interest, helping us to understand better how he came to be what he was than the reminiscences of unsympathetic or unobservant school-fellows, friends or relations. If, for instance, you would know what Goldsmith was through his father, both by heredity and by the instructions and associations of his impressionable years, you have but

to turn to *The Deserted Village*, to *The Vicar of Wakefield* and to *A Citizen of the World*, to find different portraits of him "without whom he had not been," and without whose precept and example he had been a far different Goldsmith from the most lovable of all our poets. Let me give the *Citizen of the World* portrait of his father, not only because it is the least known of the three, but also because it is more definite than that in *The Deserted Village* and more faithful than that in *The Vicar of Wakefield*:—

"My father, the younger son of a good family, was possessed of a small living in the Church. His education was above his fortune, and his generosity greater than his education. Poor as he was, he had his flatterers poorer than himself; for every dinner he gave them they returned equivalent in praise; and this was all he wanted. The same ambition that actuates a monarch at the head of an army, influenced my father at the head of his table. He told the story of the ivy-tree and that was laughed at; he repeated the jest of the two scholars and the one pair of breeches, and the company laughed at that; but the story of Taffy and the sedan chair was sure to set the table in a roar. Thus his pleasures increased in proportion to the pleasure he gave; he loved all the world and he fancied all the world loved him. As his fortune was but small, he lived up to the very extent of it. He had no intention of leaving his children money, for that was dross; he resolved they should have learning, for learning, he used to observe, was better than silver and gold. For this purpose he undertook to instruct us himself, and took as much pains to form our morals as to improve our understanding. We were told that universal benevolence

was what first cemented society ; we were taught to consider all the wants of mankind as our own ; to regard 'the human face divine' with affection and esteem. He wound us up to be mere machines of pity and rendered us incapable of withstanding the slightest impulse made either by real or fictitious distress. In a word, we were perfectly instructed in the arts of giving away thousands before we were taught the more necessary qualifications of getting a farthing."

Thus both by blood and breeding Goldsmith was formed to be Machiavelli's notion of a Christian—a philanthropist whose principles rendered him up a helpless prey to the unprincipled—or, to use an illustration of the poet's own—"he was thrust into the world like one of those gladiators who were exposed without armour in the amphitheatre of Rome." It was also from his father that Oliver derived not only indiscriminating generosity, but uncalculating improvidence. The Rev. Charles Goldsmith married Anne, the daughter of his old schoolmaster, Oliver Jones, on an income of forty pounds a year—a fortune which they brought five children into the world to share.

The fifth of these was Oliver, born 10th November 1728, in the village of Pallas, Co. Longford ; but before he was two his father's promotion to the Rectory of Kilkenny West (and to an income of £200 a-year) caused the migration of the family to Lissoy, Co. Westmeath—the sweet Auburn where the poet was brought up, the goal, as it was the starting-place, of all his day-dreams :—

"In all my wanderings round this world of care,
In all my griefs—and God has given my share—

I still had hopes my latest hours to crown,
 Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down
 To husband out life's taper at the close,
 And keep the flame from wasting by repose :
 I still had hopes—for pride attends us still—
 Amidst the swains to show my book-learned skill,
 Around my fire an evening group to draw,
 And tell of all I felt and all I saw ;
 And, as a hare whom hounds and horns pursue,
 Pants to the place from whence at first he flew,
 I still had hopes, my long vexations past,
 Here to return—and die at home at last."

An image Dryden uses for a life that has gone full circle, and not, like Goldsmith's, but half the sad round :—

"A hare in pastures or in plains is found,
 Emblem of human life, who runs the round,
 And after all his wandering ways are done,
 His circle fills and ends as he begun."

No doubt Macaulay tells you and even Forster tells you that in *The Deserted Village* Goldsmith is describing, not the home of his childhood, but some English village with which he had no associations. "Everything in *The Deserted Village*," says Forster, "is English—the feeling, incidents, descriptions, allusions; and this consideration may save us the needless trouble in seeking to identify Auburn—a name he obtained from Langton—with Lissay." "The village in its happy state," says Macaulay, "is a true English village. The village in decay is an Irish village. The felicity and the misery which Goldsmith has brought together belong to two different countries and to two different stages in the progress of society. He had assuredly never seen in his native island such a rural paradise, such a seat of

plenty, content and tranquillity as his Auburn. He had assuredly never seen in England all the inhabitants of such a paradise turned out of their homes in one day and forced to emigrate to America. The hamlet he had probably seen in Kent: the ejection he had probably seen in Munster; but by joining the two he has produced something that never was and never will be seen in any part of the world."

Of course it matters no more to me than it does to my readers whether the original of Auburn was an English or Irish village—except for this, that I am going throughout upon the assumption that Goldsmith uses up in his works only his own experiences. As in *The Traveller* he recalled his own experiences when he tramped in his youth through Holland, Switzerland, Italy and France, so in *The Deserted Village* he goes back to the memories of his childhood. And, indeed, practically Macaulay and Forster and the rest admit that Auburn was Lissoy—that its village preacher, its schoolmaster, the villagers and their sports were all memories of Goldsmith's childhood. Who was the village preacher described in one of the noblest images in our poetry?

" His ready smile a parent's warmth expressed,
Their welfare pleased him and their cares distressed.
To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,
But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven ;
As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,
Swells from the vale and midway leaves the storm ;
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head."

That, as everyone admits, is a portrait of the poet's father. While again, it is indisputable that the

schoolmaster so humorously described was Oliver's old pedagogue, Thomas Byrne :—

“There in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule,
The village master taught his little school.
A man severe he was and stern to view,
I knew him well and every truant knew ;
Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace
The day's disasters in his morning face ;
Full well they laughed with counterfeited glee
At all his jokes—and many a joke had he !
Full well the busy whisper circling round
Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frowned.
Yet he was kind, or, if severe in aught,
The love he bore to learning was in fault.
The village all declared how much he knew ;
’Twas certain he could write and cipher too ;
Lands he could measure ; terms and tides presage ;
And e’en the story ran that he could gauge !
In arguing, too, the parson owned his skill,
For e’en though vanquished, he could argue still !
While words of learned length and thundering sound
Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around ;
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew
That one small head could carry all he knew !”

Once more, the sports described were to be seen in Ireland, and only in Ireland, in every village on every holiday up to the year of the Great Famine ; while it was hardly to an English village, whose “name he had obtained from Langton,” that the poet longed “to return and die at home at last.” But if, as Forster and Macaulay admit, all the personages and all the incidents in *The Deserted Village* are personages and incidents which belong to the Lissoy of Goldsmith's childhood, what remains to be claimed as English ? Only the prosperity of the village. “The village in its happy days is a true English

village," says Macaulay, leaving out of account what to him was unintelligible, unimaginable, the aching longing of an Irish exile who always sees the old country transfigured through the mist and mirage of his tears. There was a poor woman who, shovelled out of Ireland after the famine, died soon after in a Liverpool slum, and in dying, while her soul was poised for flight to another world of which her priest was speaking, she interrupted him to ask, "Father, will my soul pass through Ireland?" That is the nostalgia of an Irish exile. And here is Goldsmith, an exile from Ireland, living in a garret in Grub Street, and recalling there memories of old days in the old country. Memory comes to him, as she comes to all, a disembodied spirit, etherealised and idealised—

"Her gradual fingers steal,
And touch upon master-chord
Of all we felt and feel.
Old wishes, ghosts of broken plans,
And phantom hopes assemble ;
And that child's heart within the man's
Begins to move and tremble.
Thro' many an hour of summer suns,
By many pleasant ways,
Against its fountain upwards runs
The current of our days."

And you expect this Irish exile and poet, looking back from a London garret upon days "dear to him as the ruddy drops that visited his sad heart," to see their scenes with the eyes of Macaulay!

However, even Macaulay allows the village in its depopulation and decay to be Irish, not disputing Ireland's immemorial claim to wretchedness. "I am a poor fellow, sir," says Autolycus to Camillo.

"Why, be so still," retorts Camillo · "here's nobody will steal that from thee!"

Those, then, who to-day see nothing in Lissoy which recalls Auburn, forget the moral of Tieck's "Elves." It is not distance only that lends enchantment to the scenes of our childhood, nor only the mirage that rises up in the desert of after years; but also the ineffaceable vividness and delightfulness of first impressions, and the irrecoverable happiness of days when care brooded over us protectingly and had not its beak in our heart.

To the memory of an Irish exile and poet Lissoy and its people, bathed in the golden light of the dawn of life, might well be transfigured into Auburn.

But while little Oliver was taking in these impressions of Lissoy which were one day to immortalise it, what were the impressions which Lissoy took in then of him? They are characteristic—of the observers. The old lady, a Mrs Delap, who taught him his letters at three, testifies, "Never was so dull a boy; he seemed impenetrably stupid." How brilliant, then, must have been the teacher who could teach an impenetrably stupid infant of three to read! Why, even Swift thought it to the credit of his precocious cleverness that he was able to read at three. Like Swift, too, Goldsmith at school and in College was thought impenetrably stupid by observers of the Delap kind. "Goldsmith's fellow-pupils," testifies Dr Annesley Streat, "regarded him as a stupid, heavy blockhead, little better than a fool, whom everybody made fun of." Now, in the first place, it must be remembered that these impressions of Goldsmith's schoolmistress and schoolmates were gathered years after his death, when the "Poor Poll"

paradox, being then on every lip, gave a lead to such dim remembrances of the poet. In the second place, the paradox itself—that the most exquisite and versatile writer of his generation should be an imbecile in ordinary intercourse—was doubly acceptable to “the general,” both for its strangeness and for its lowering invidious greatness to, or rather below, the level of average littleness. But, in the third place, and chiefly, everyone sees only what he has an eye for seeing, and old ladies, whether in an infant school or in a University, have a tendency to confound the machinery of thought with thought, to confound memory with understanding, and learning, which is the mere fuel of wisdom, with the sacred fire itself, which, by the way, in a University, it as often as not overlays to extinction.

“The sheep,” says Epictetus, “do not manifest to the shepherd how much they have eaten by producing fodder; but by producing, through the digestion of their food, wool and milk”; but in infant schools and sometimes even in Universities, the shepherds look only for the reproduction of fodder. “When a University,” said Leslie Stephen to me once, “is said to have produced a genius, it means only that it has not succeeded in extinguishing him.”

I should not, therefore, be disposed to attach much weight to the testimony of Mrs Delap, nor to that of any other grammar-monger, to Goldsmith’s “impenetrable stupidity” in his childhood, even if there were no other evidence extant of the promise of these early years. But the evidence on the other side is so conclusive that the importance attached by Goldsmith’s biographers to such testimony as Mrs Delap’s seems to me unaccountable. So far

from showing in his childhood no promise of after distinction, such promise sufficed to overcome all the objections and obstacles, which were many and grave, to his being allowed the advantage of a liberal education. "At the age of seven or eight," writes his sister, Mrs Hodson, "he discovered a natural turn for rhyming, and often amused his father and his friends by early poetical attempts. When he could scarcely write legibly, he was always scribbling verses which he burnt as he wrote them. Observing his fondness for books and learning, his mother, with whom he was always a favourite, pleaded with his father to give him a liberal education ; but his own narrow income, the expense attending the education of his eldest son, and his numerous family, were strong objections." Oliver was intended, she adds, for some mercantile employment, but the intention was given up because "he began at so early a period to show signs of genius that he quickly engaged the notice of all the friends of the family, many of whom were in the Church."

By the way, Mrs Hodson's enumeration of the causes which straitened her father's circumstances is so far imperfect, that it omits the most serious—her own runaway marriage. As the rich man she ran away with was in a higher social position than her own, her father, out of a false family pride, insisted on levelling her up, so to say, with a dowry of four hundred pounds, which could be raised only by the sacrifice of his tithes and rented land and by the sacrifice also of the interests of his other children. The raising of this dowry in obedience to the Gospel precept of giving to those who have by taking it from those who want, so severely crippled his

father's resources that the promise shown by Oliver must have been pronounced indeed to induce the sacrifices which had to be made to give him a liberal education. But, indeed, we have his own testimony to the hopes he had excited—and disappointed—in that transparent piece of autobiography, *The Man in Black* :—

“The first opportunity my father had of finding his expectations disappointed was in the middling figure I made at the University. He had flattered himself that he should soon see me rising into the foremost rank in literary reputation, but was mortified to find me utterly unnoticed and unknown.”

When you come down from this general testimony to the promise Goldsmith showed in his childhood to the particular specimens which have been preserved of his conversation, they are certainly not of the “Poor Poll” kind. That these two repartees should have been preserved at all suggests of itself that Oliver was regarded then rather as the wit than as the dunce of the family. Here they are :—

An attack of small-pox at the age of eight had so pitted a face already painfully plain that Oliver was continually being jeered at by other boys for his ugliness. When, however, a grown-up cousin, who had taken to disreputable courses taunted him, “Why, Noll, you are become a fright! When do you mean to get handsome again?” After a moment of miserable silence—for Oliver had become painfully conscious of his ugliness—the child retorted, “I mean to get better, sir, when you do!”

To another jeer at his plainness he made at the same age of nine a happier retort. At a party at his uncle's house Oliver in the interval between two

country dances jumped up to perform a hornpipe; but his squat figure seemed to the fiddler so unsuited to the performance that he shouted derisively, "Æsop!" Hereupon the child stopping in the middle of the room and of the dance retorted—

"Heralds! Proclaim aloud! All saying,
'See Æsop dancing and his monkey playing!'"

I am laying some stress upon this conflict of evidence *re* Goldsmith's intelligence in his early years, because it is continually recurring later, and you are continually encountering Mrs Delaps amongst the poet's friends and biographers. The men who read much but assimilate little can never understand the men who read little but assimilate much. I remember an old nurse assuring me in my childhood that swallows never ate and never rested, because she had never seen them alight and devour worms; and Goldsmith's swallow-like and lifelong habit of feeding flying with a flight zigzag and desultory, and on food out of sight of those far beneath him, was similarly misinterpreted. "He was impenetrably stupid!" cried Mrs Delap; "He was a stupid heavy blockhead, little better than a fool!" cried his school-mates. "Now, blockhead!" was his college tutor's usual address to him. "Sir, he knows nothing!" roared Johnson of him to Boswell. Even in the days of his boyhood, Goldsmith, like the swallows, fed high up and flying. At the age of six he passed from the charge of Mrs Delap to that of a retired old soldier, Thomas Byrne, from whom he probably learned as much in his own way as he was supposed to learn little. Byrne, who had been educated for a school-master, enlisted, fought under Marlborough, rose to

the rank of quartermaster, and at the return of peace, retired to exercise at Lissoy his original profession of pedagogue. But, if the old soldier now overlaid the original profession of schoolmaster, underneath both old soldier and schoolmaster lay the Irish peasant, whose store of fairy tales was as unlimited as his belief in "the good people," and whose conversance with the histories of Irish robbers, rapparees, pirates, smugglers and outlaws, was at once deeper and more sympathetic than his knowledge of Agamemnon and Achilles, Ulysses and Æneas. According to his biographers Oliver learned little from Byrne, because the old soldier was more given to tell stories than to hear lessons; but is it not possible that to a child of Oliver's age and character the stories were more educational than the lessons? What Goldsmith himself says of the unpalatable studies forced upon him in the University is yet more true of studies forced upon a child. "Such studies," he says, "were unsuited to a time when my imagination and memory, yet unsatisfied, were more eager after new objects than desirous of reasoning on those I knew."

For a poet certainly Johnson's advice, which is also Emerson's and Carlyle's, is sound—"A man should read as inclination leads him; what he reads as a task will do him little good." Or as Shakespeare puts it:—

"The Mathematics and the Metaphysics
Fall to them as you find your stomach serves you;
No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en;
In brief, sir, study what you most affect."

Probably Oliver profited more intellectually by Byrne's stories of strange creatures and countries,

exploits and adventures than his fellow-pupils did by the school lessons.

On the other hand, it is probable that Thomas Byrne's traveller's tales tended to encourage Oliver's natural Bohemianism ; which, again, might well have been confirmed by the continual transplantation of the boy from school to school. The attack of confluent small-pox, which nearly cost Oliver his life, no doubt had much to do with his removal from the charge of Byrne, at the age of eight, to the care of the Rev. Mr Griffin, master of Elphin School, County Roscommon. With Mr Griffin he stayed from eight to eleven, and was then transferred for two years to the care of Mr Campbell of Athlone, passing from his charge, at the age of thirteen, to that of the Rev. Patrick Hughes of Edgeworthstown, with whom he remained to the age of seventeen. At all these schools, except that of Mr Hughes, Oliver was well thrashed as a blockhead, and as only blockheads in those days of savage discipline were thrashed. I think it is Thackeray who notes the dire significance of the technical phrase for going to school in "the good old times"—"he passed *sub ferulâ* of the Rev. Dr Swishem." I find that *ferula*, i.e. "fennel-giant," was the plant in the pith of which Prometheus preserved the fire he stole from heaven, and schoolmasters in those days presumably sought to communicate the sacred flame *ab extra* to those who failed to absorb it *ab intra*. Certainly the amount of flogging then inflicted was so frightful, that the masters might have said of the boys who were committed to them for instruction what Majendie said of the dogs committed to him for vivisection : "*Vous savez, mon ami, que les chiens ne s'amuseut pas chez moi.*"

If Oliver had more than his share of thrashing in school from the masters, out of school he had more than his share of persecution from the boys, who never failed to ridicule his squat, awkward figure and his ugly, pock-marked face. This quickened his self-consciousness, and deepened almost into a disease his self-distrust. What has been so often ridiculed as Goldsmith's vanity was vanity inverted, so to say—not an eagerness to display powers of which he was conscious, but an eagerness to reassure himself of the possession of powers of which he was diffident. Compare *e.g.* Boswell's vanity with Goldsmith's. Boswell in conversation reminds you of a girl who is self-complacently admiring herself in the glass; Goldsmith of a girl who hurries nervously to the glass to reassure herself that all is right. The distinction declares itself upon failure. Whereas no failure can disconcert Boswell, Goldsmith's discomfiture upon failure was, as everyone testifies, pitiable.

This tormenting self-distrust was undoubtedly deepened in all the schools Oliver was sent to, except the last, whose master, the Rev. Patrick Hughes, treated him with a consideration which excited as much the surprise as the envy of his fellow-pupils, who could see only the lad's ugliness, awkwardness, sensitiveness and shyness. But Mr Hughes seemed to have discerned with Oliver's own people his early promise, perhaps even discerned that genius itself

"Inculto latet hoc sub corpore."

It was while on the way to Mr Hughes' school at Edgeworthstown for his last term that the adventure befell Oliver to which we owe the plot of the delightful comedy, *She Stoops to Conquer: or The*

Mistakes of a Night. Oliver, now seventeen, set out on horseback with a guinea in his purse, for Edgeworthstown. Being a born Bohemian and also bound for school, Oliver lingered out his day of independence till night fell upon him many miles short and wide of his destination, for he found himself in the middle of the town of Ardagh. Full of the importance of seventeen, and of the possession of a horse and of a guinea, Oliver called imperiously to a man who was passing, and asked him with the air of a benighted prince: "My good man, what is the best house in this neighbourhood?" Fortunately, at least for us, the man, Cornelius Kelly, late fencing-master to the Marquis of Granby, was a wag, whose sense of humour was tickled by the swagger of the youth. "The best house in the place? I'll show your honour the best house in the place," and accordingly he directed him to Squire Featherstone's as to an inn. Oliver rode up to the "inn," dismounted, flung the reins of his horse to a groom, swaggered into the dining-room, and ordered the amazed squire to furnish forthwith the best dinner his house could supply. Now the squire also was fortunately a wag, and recognising not only the mistake, but the lad who made it—for Oliver's father had been his college mate—he at once threw himself into the part of an obsequious landlord, and played it so deferentially that the young gentleman unbent to put his host at his ease, and even invited him and his wife and daughter to partake of a bottle of their own wine which he had ordered. Then he chatted with them with a kind of patronising familiarity till bedtime, when he ordered his candle and a hot-cake for breakfast, and strutted off after his bowing host to

his room. Next morning, having had the hot-cake for breakfast, he ordered his horse and his bill. It was while he was nervously fingering his guinea, wondering whether it would suffice to pay all tips and charges, that the squire disclosed to him "The Mistakes of a Night," to his overwhelming confusion.

This episode of Oliver's school-days is not the only bit in *She Stoops to Conquer* which was borrowed from his own character and experience. I think there is no doubt that we have in this comedy the clue to much that made Goldsmith show to disadvantage in uncongenial companionship. He sat himself for part of the portrait of Tony Lumpkin and also for part of the portrait of young Marlow. Like Tony, he was at home with his inferiors, and, like young Marlow, he was ill at ease, awkward and blundering in the society of grave, conventional or "superior" persons. In each case a disconcerting self-consciousness and self-distrust, which were quieted by appreciation and disquieted by inappreciation, explain Goldsmith's social success or failure. His very swagger was self-distrust made desperate, as shy folk often blunder desperately into boldness, "outfacing it," like Rosalind in her mannish masquerade :—

"In my heart
Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will—
We'll have a swashing and a martial outside,
As many other mannish cowards have
That do outface it with their semblances."

CHAPTER II

COLLEGE DAYS

MRS HODSON, as we have seen, ascribed the straitened circumstances which made it difficult to give her brother, Oliver, a liberal education to their father's "narrow income, numerous family and the expense attending the education of his eldest son," discreetly omitting all mention of "the expense attending the marriage of his eldest daughter"—far the severest strain of all upon the family resources. In truth, the real family sacrifice was made, not to give Oliver the University education he needed, but to give his sister the dowry she did not need, and *because* she did not need it. Because she had made a clandestine marriage with a rich man's son (while he was her brother Henry's pupil), her father thought himself bound in honour to provide her at the cost of his small capital with a dowry of £400. "The highest sense of honour," says Prior, "inspired this sacrifice," but where was the sense of honour of the rich son-in-law who accepted it? *Noblesse oblige* usually binds the poor man who wishes to be thought noble; but the noble, assured of his social standing, can afford to be shabby. These rich Hodsons did nothing to lighten the load which the Quixotic sacrifice they accepted imposed upon the Goldsmiths.

The first to feel its weight was Oliver. He had to enter Trinity College as a sizar, which in those

days meant working his passage through the University before the mast. Prior, who admires so highly the snobbish sacrifice which reduced Oliver to this servitude, naturally admires also the servitude itself. He describes the sizarship, as it then existed, as "one of those judicious and considerate arrangements that gives to the less opulent the opportunity of cultivating learning at a trifling expense." At the trifling expense of self-respect. The sizar of those days, clothed in a servant's dress, had to do the tasks of a servant. He had in the morning to sweep the college courts, and in the afternoon to carry up from the kitchen the dinner of the dons and to wait upon them at the meal. Thus an *Alma Mater* became the most unbenign of stepmothers to the lad whose scholarship she honoured by pointing out the recipient of the honour to the scorn of his fellow-students, and whose scholarship she pretended to reward by an abatement of the cost of the course, while exacting for that abatement the uttermost farthing in menial service.

The effect of such degradation and scorn on a lad of Goldsmith's age and temperament may be imagined, and need not be imagined or conjectured merely, since the poet himself afterwards refers to it. Years after, when in so forgiving a memory the bitterness must have been much softened, Goldsmith writes thus to his brother Henry to dissuade him from entering his son as a sizar at Trinity:—"If he has ambition, strong passions and an exquisite sensibility to contempt, do not send him there, unless you have no other trade for him except your own."

Goldsmith himself held out against entering Trinity as a sizar as long as it was possible for him to hold

out against his uncle, Contarine, whom all that love Goldsmith should love. His faith in Oliver was more surprising than the lack of faith in him of his schoolmasters and mates. Up to the date of this staunch and generous uncle's death, Oliver had the most unbroken record of failures of any recounted in literary history, yet neither the faith, nor the hope, nor, above all, the charity of Uncle Contarine ever failed him. It was this uncle who now persuaded Oliver to enter Trinity as a sizar after the boy had held out doggedly against the degradation for a year; and the argument which prevailed was of the kind Achilles addressed to Lycaon, when Lycaon was ill-bred enough to object to being spitted on the spear of the son of Peleus. The hero waved aside the impertinent objection with the words, "I, too, am mortal!"—and there was no more to be said. Similarly Uncle Contarine had to say only, "I, myself, have been a sizar!" and Oliver succumbed. On 11th June 1745, he entered for the sizarship, which he succeeded, but barely succeeded, in getting, as he was the last of the eight candidates who passed. Indeed his whole University career was as little distinguished as that of Swift or of Burke, and there is perhaps some significance in the fact that the three most distinguished of the *alumni* of the Dublin University were three of the least distinguished of its students. All three could probably have said at the close of their course in Trinity College what Montaigne said at the close of his course at the most famous of all the French Colleges of his day—Guienne:—"à treize ans que je sortis du College, j'avois achevé mon cours (qu'ils appellent) et, à la verité, sans aucun fruict que je peusse à present mettre en compte."

As for Goldsmith, if he was none the better intellectually for his residence in Trinity College, morally he was made much the worse, since the brutality of his College tutor, the Rev. Theaker Wilder, intensified his natural sensitiveness, self-consciousness and self-distrust. "Theaker Wilder," says the Percy Memoir, "a man of the most morose and merciless temper, thenceforth persecuted Goldsmith with unremitting cruelty, especially at the quarterly examinations, where he would insult him before his fellow-students by sarcastic taunts and ironical applause of the severest malignity." Thus Goldsmith, the most sensitive of men at the most sensitive of ages, was held up to the scorn of his fellow-students both for his poverty and for his stupidity.

Theaker Wilder's brutality was perhaps in part responsible for Goldsmith's rebellious attitude towards the constituted authorities of the college, for he distinguished himself there by two scrapes, one of which nearly caused his expulsion and the other his self-expulsion from the University.

A bailiff, who had the audacity to arrest a student within the sacred Alsatia of the College precincts, was followed into the city by the captive's fellow-students, who discovered and dragged the man back into the precincts he had violated, where they stripped him naked and pumped upon him, according to the unwritten, but unquestioned, law of the undergraduates. Intoxicated by their victory the students rushed out again to make an attack upon the Black Dog (the Dublin Newgate) to set all its prisoners free. As both they and their townsmen allies were unarmed, they were, of course, repulsed by the armed garrison of the gaol—not without loss of life. This tragic

ending of a students' frolic of course compelled an investigation, and its result was the detection and expulsion of five of the ringleaders, while five of the others, amongst them Goldsmith, were publicly admonished, "*Quod seditioni favissent et et tumultuantibus opem tulissent.*" It is supposed that Goldsmith's attempt to win a scholarship in the month following the admonition was intended to wipe out the disgrace; but it is hardly credible that even Goldsmith would go in for a scholarship after only a month's preparation. Nor, again, is it probable that he would run the risk within a few weeks of a second disgrace—as he did—if he had felt the first so keenly. For when, upon his failure to get the scholarship, he was awarded an exhibition of the value of thirty shillings, he must needs celebrate the triumph by a party given in his rooms to *both* sexes—as gross a breach of University discipline as could well be committed. Theaker Wilder, hearing of this outrage upon College decency, hurried up to his pupil's garret rooms, burst in upon the orgy and knocked down the host! The only romantic course for a hero so assaulted is to rise and knock down his assailant in his turn; but in romance the hero has always the advantage of thews and sinews, whereas in this case the advantage of the thews and sinews was overpoweringly on the side of the villain. It is recorded of Theaker Wilder that upon receiving an accidental flick from a coachman's whip, he sprang from the pavement to the box of the moving coach and felled the offender to the ground. Besides, in Goldsmith's case, this ruffianly clergyman felt secure against retaliation, since the raising a finger against a Fellow meant expulsion and ruin to a student. By the way, it was

perhaps this knock-down blow of Theaker Wilder's that Johnson had in mind when, in referring to Goldsmith's encounter with the publisher, Evans, he said rather ungenerously: "Why, sir, I believe it is the first time he has *beat*; he may have been *beaten* before"—a safe enough sneer from a giant like Johnson, whose chances in any brute encounter of force would be immeasurably greater than Goldsmith's. Where the sword made the chances more even, while calling for more courage, Goldsmith, to Johnson's knowledge, showed himself the reverse of a coward. Goldsmith's feelings upon being so brutally outraged before the eyes of his guests may be imagined. Feeling the degradation of the blow to be utter and irretrievable, he resolved to quit, not the College only, but even the country.

Here is the first of a succession of similar resolves which followed invariably the same faltering and ineffective course. Micawber himself had not such a "knack at hoping," at prospecting, at taking the indispensable first practical step "of running down to have a look at the Medway," as had Oliver Goldsmith. Having sold his clothes and books to provide the means of getting to Cork and from thence to America, he, at least, succeeded in crossing from the University into the city of Dublin, where he lingered till he had spent what money he had raised, down to a single shilling. Now was the moment for starting *via* Cork for America. He set out accordingly, and contrived to subsist for three days on the shilling. After that he lived on the few pence he raised by the sale of such clothes as he could spare from his person. After that he starved.

Years afterwards he told Sir Joshua Reynolds that

the most delicious repast he had ever tasted was a handful of grey peas given him by a girl at a wake after he had fasted for four-and-twenty hours. With the little strength that remained to him he staggered on to Lissoy, where that brother to whom always his "heart untravelled turned with ceaseless pain," poured oil and wine into his wounds, restored his strength, revived his spirit, and sent him forth hopefully once more on life's journey. Taking him back to Trinity College this brother Henry succeeded in effecting a sort of reconciliation between him and Theaker Wilder.

But Wilder had for Goldsmith the hatred the bully has for a boy he has once taken to beating—not the mere tyrant's "*odisse quem læseris*" antipathy, but the brute instinct which makes a dog fall continually and at sight upon a weaker dog it has worried once. There is nothing in which increase of appetite grows by what it feeds on more certainly than a habit of bullying, till it becomes at last an absolute instinct in the tormentor to fly upon his prey at sight. Thus Goldsmith became the standing butt of this brute Wilder's sneers and sarcasms, and of the sycophantic ridicule of his fellow-students, until he got to believe himself as incorrigibly stupid as his tutor considered him. In truth, Goldsmith's self-respect to the very end of his days never quite recovered the spring which had been trampled out of it at school and in College.

But outside the hall and class-room Goldsmith was the mark also for scorn, but of a more vulgar kind.

"Nil habet infelix paupertas durius in se
Quam quod ridiculos homines facit,"

and Goldsmith was in continual and desperate straits for money. Even during his father's lifetime the supplies from home were scanty and intermittent ; but his father died a year and a half after Oliver entered College, leaving him almost wholly dependent upon the little his Uncle Contarine could spare him. He eked out these scanty and precarious supplies by composing street ballads, which he sold at five shillings a-piece, and derived from them something as precious to him even as the money—his first taste of fame ! He would steal out of the College at night to hear his ballads sung, and to watch the effect of the performance under the dim light of the street oil-lamp upon the ragged audience. Strange "first nights" compared with that of *She Stoops to Conquer* ; but everything is relative, and, as that handful of grey peas was the most delicious repast he had ever tasted, possibly the printing, the performance, and the popular appreciation of his first ballad gave the scorned sizar as exquisite a pleasure as any after triumph. At all events, the five shillings it brought him was more needed and more welcome than any after honorarium.

In pitying Goldsmith's poverty, however, it is only fair to remember that we are pitying no mere accident, but something as essentially part of himself as his kindliness. However prosperous his circumstances, he must always be needy. Indeed, the more prosperous he grew, the needier he grew, since prosperity enabled him to get into debt, and he took the fullest advantage of the privilege. He lived as entirely in the present as a child, and, as he was a child also in guilelessness, anyone could impose upon his simplicity, while no one could out-weary his good-

nature. However sore his own straits, be sure he seldom brought home that five shillings unbroken to his College garret; for he could no more pass a beggar than a greedy child could pass a sweet-stuff shop without his money burning a hole in his pocket.

Here, *e.g.*, is a characteristic story told of him by a cousin and fellow-collegian of his, Edward Mills, to whom Oliver often owed a shilling or a breakfast. Mills called one morning to offer Oliver a breakfast, when he was adjured in answer to his knock and in a smothered voice to force open the door and enter. When Mills and others had at last forced the bolted door, they found Goldsmith so entangled in the ticking of his bed that he could not extricate himself without help. He explained that, as the night before had been piercingly cold, he had given a poor perishing woman with five children all his bed-clothes. What could he do? He had nothing else, not a penny, to give her? "It *was* a cold night, too," he added, "for I couldn't at first sleep till I thought of ripping open the mattress to lie in the ticking."

Of course, such a man could never be anything else but poor. But if poverty so caused is not to be pitied as an accident, neither is it to be pitied as a misfortune. I am sure few men have had happier moments in his harassed life than Goldsmith, since to such a man there is no pleasure like giving pleasure. "This remark," he says, in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, "will hold good through life—that the poorer the guest the better pleased he is with being treated; and, as some men gaze with admiration at the colours of a tulip, or the wing of a butterfly, so I was by Nature an admirer of happy, human faces." No man is to be pitied, or anything save envied,

who gave so continually and unweariedly, even though without return or gratitude, if it was so much more blessed to him to give than to receive, as it was to Goldsmith. The real trouble of his life—and it was lifelong—was a never-satisfied craving for sympathy and appreciation, of which he was almost as much disappointed at the height of his fame in London as in these days of obscurity and scorn in Trinity College. If these College days were the most wretched, it was because they were the most humiliating of his life. He got done with them at last. After taking an undistinguished degree on 27th February 1749, he left the place behind him for ever.

Goldsmith, we are told, "was a loungee at the College gate," at that gate where his statue stands to-day; but the University which now honours him, and claims him as an honour, did what it could through the degradation of its "distinction" of a sizarship, and through its representative Theaker Wilder, to break or abase his spirit. It is characteristic of Goldsmith that he gibbets no one in his works, though no one had had more provocation to take such a revenge. Never was a man more exquisitely sensitive to snubs, slights and insults than Goldsmith; never was a man more mercilessly snubbed, slighted and insulted, but where in all his works is his revenge? You have Dryden's ferocious revenge in *MacFlecknow*; you have Pope's venomous revenge in *The Dunciad*. But Goldsmith, who had given infinitely less and received infinitely more provocation than either Dryden or Pope, is magnanimously silent, or breaks silence magnanimously in such a poem as *Retaliation*, where his

sweet-natured humour plays about the faults and follies and frailties of his friends, like moonlight upon a ruin—showing indeed the gaps and rents and breaches of decay, but softening even as it shows them, and “smoothing the raven down of darkness till it smiled.”

Of the miseries and mortifications of these College days, then, you have no record in his works and only the gentlest reference to them. He never gibbets this Theaker Wilder—who was killed, by the way, in a dissolute brawl—and he refers to the degradation of a sizarship only as a contradiction:—“That men should be at once learning the liberal arts and at the same time treated as slaves—at once studying freedom and practising slavery.” On the failure of the University to evolve, to distinguish, or even to recognise genius, he makes only in his *Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning*, a mild reflection—a reflection on the general dullness of its honour men; while in one of his essays occurs the following reference to the College career of Swift:—“Dean Swift was long considered an incorrigible dunce, and did not obtain his degree at the University but *ex speciali gratiâ*; yet when his powers began to unfold he signalised himself by a very remarkable superiority of genius. When a youth therefore appears dull of apprehension and seems to derive no advantage from study and instruction, the tutor must exercise his sagacity in discovering whether the soil be absolutely barren or sown with seed repugnant to his nature, or of such a quality as requires repeated culture and length of time to get its juices in fermentation.”

CHAPTER III

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

THE Prophet Isaiah mocks thus the idolaters of his day. "You go into the forest," he says, "select and cut down a cedar tree. You use the strong limbs of it as pillars of your house, the finer parts for your furniture, what is fit for neither pillars, beams nor furniture you use for firewood; but of the refuse, unfit even for firewood, you make a god!" I fear that the divines of the days of Goldsmith were made of similar stuff—as they are perhaps sometimes made even to-day—of men who lack the stamina or fire or force for the other professions—

*"Olim truncus eram ficulnus, inutile lignum,
Quum faber incertus scamnum faceretne Priapum,
Maluit esse Deum. Deus inde ego."*

I have little doubt that the qualifications for the sacred ministry, which his relations one and all discerned in Goldsmith, were of this negative sort. As he was not of the stuff of which lawyers, doctors or business men were made, lacking the staying power needed to get into or get on in any of these callings, he was obviously intended by nature for the Church, which was at once easy to enter and easeful when entered. No doubt in the Levitical Law a young ass was especially rejected as unfit for divine dedication, but we are not now under the Mosaic Dispensation. Oliver himself modestly and vehemently protested

against this divine dedication ; but two arguments prevailed with him. In the first place, his loving and beloved Uncle Contarine had given his vote for the Church, and in the second place, there were two entire years before he was eligible—at twenty-three—for ordination. Oliver had at least one Christian qualification—that of taking no more thought for the morrow than the birds of the air, since sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof. Never did anyone abandon himself to the entire enjoyment of the present without an after-thought of the future than did Oliver. He was a boy all his life, and now he was a boy who had left Dotheboys Hall and Mr Squeers behind him for ever, while before him stretched an apparently endless holiday of two whole years. Every Irishman must smile at the following solemn note by Mr Forster on the entry discovered in an old shop account-book, recording Oliver's mother's indebtedness for groceries :—"Tea by Master Noll." "I subjoin," writes Mr Forster, "a curious passage from Mr Shaw Mason's volume already quoted, in which what appears to be a misstatement of dates is either to be explained by supposing that the entries as to 'Master Noll' refer to a period before the family had removed from Lissoy, or by the suggestion that the young bachelor of arts still ran the errands of his boyhood and retained his familiar name." Why, in Ireland Lord Burleigh himself would be called "Master William" by those who had known him in boyhood, however ponderously he might shake his head in disapproval ; while even in London and even at the height of his fame, Goldsmith was known as "Noll" to Dick, Tom and Harry.

On the very night after the success of *The Good-Natured Man*, an eminent pig-butcher at the Wednesday Club shouted across the table to him: "Come, Noll, here's my service to you, old boy!" This was too much for Goldsmith's friend, Glover, who whispered to him: "Don't allow such a fellow to take such liberties." "Let him alone," whispered Goldsmith back, "you'll see how civilly I'll let him down." Having waited accordingly for the next pause in the conversation, Goldsmith with his haughtiest *haut en bas* stateliness addressed the pig-butcher in measured tones: "Mr B., I have the honour of drinking your good health."

"Thankee, thankee, Noll," replied the pig-butcher with an affable nod, as a hippopotamus might wag his tail after having been agreeably tickled by a charge of snipe-shot.

Of course, then, the "young bachelor of arts" was "Master Noll" to the servants, to the shop-folk and to the villagers generally of Ballymahon, and "Noll" to the frequenters of a club he had established at the village inn. In the daytime he assisted his brother Henry, who was schoolmaster as well as vicar, in the village school at Lissoy; but at night, according to his cousin, Bob Bryanton, he had his hour of triumph at the club. What seemed to have most struck this cousin was the contrast between Goldsmith's dull depression and even dejection in Trinity College and his exhilaration at the club, where he was what Dick Swiveller would call "a choice spirit," and the master of the revels. Here he could not only tell the best story and sing best the most popular song, but also, says this cousin, make the most imposing display of erudition; for he was great at Latin quotations. I

cannot help thinking he was laughing at his old-young self, as well as at Thomas Byrne, his old schoolmaster, in describing the effect "on the gazing rustics grouped around of words of learned length and thundering sound." I am quite sure that his club not only supplied him with the originals of some of the company of the "Three Pigeons" in *She Stoops to Conquer*, but also with some of the characteristics of Tony Lumpkin, which were but exaggerations of some of his own youthful characteristics. It is, indeed, noteworthy how long unconsidered trifles of this kind lay tossing and rounding themselves, like pebbles in the sea, in the mind of Goldsmith, before they were thrown out at last in some essay, play or poem. Only the other day an old peasant from Goldsmith's native county told me in another form—the form no doubt in which the poet himself originally heard it—the precise trick which Tony played on his mother, when he advised her to pretend that the jewels were stolen, and then stole them himself. Still more noteworthy is the literary chemistry with which Goldsmith distilled from all these coarse club experiences and from his yet coarser Axe Lane-London experiences, such exquisitely pure and sweet humanity as he paints for us—as the most exquisite dyes are distilled from tar. Even Macaulay, the most unsympathetic of Goldsmith's biographers, notes with wonder this art of his of "distilling honey from the weed":—"About everything that he wrote, serious or sportive, there was a certain natural grace and decorum, hardly to be expected from a man, a great part of whose life had been passed among thieves and beggars, street-walkers and merry-andrews, in those squalid dens which are the re-

proach of great capitals." Perhaps the Celtic strain which Goldsmith must have had in him, accounts for a touch so light and bright, and again so sweet and pure.

But to whatever literary advantage he might turn these club experiences, they were not—judging from a letter to his brother-in-law, in which he described them—of a kind, either to prepare him or to recommend him for Holy Orders. Perhaps they had even something to do with his rejection by the bishop. I am sure they had more to do with it than many of the reasons assigned for it. That assigned by what ought to be the best authority—his sister's—is the worst, *i.e.*, his youth, since he had waited and wasted two years to be of the age prescribed for ordination, twenty-three. The popular reason for his rejection—that he presented himself for the examination dressed in a pair of scarlet breeches—is hardly more probable. There is no "wedding garment" prescribed to candidates for orders, and a scarlet pair of breeches then—presuming that Oliver wore such—would be hardly more noticeable or objectionable than the pair of light trousers in which many a candidate presents himself for examination to-day. Less improbable is the suggestion that his old enemy Theaker Wilder blocked his way by a report of his College record to the bishop. Most probable of all explanations of his failure is that of his ignorance of theology. The bishop probably was as dissatisfied with his papers as Dr Gregg, the Bishop of Cork, was with a sermon of Dean Magee's (afterwards Archbishop of York), which he said "had not as much Gospel in it as would save a rabbit."

At all events, Goldsmith was plucked and had to

take to the usual resource of such failures, tuition; for in those days and even up to yesterday, it was the failures of the professions that undertook to prepare for the professions. Accordingly Goldsmith's good genius, Uncle Contarine, broke his fall by procuring him a tuition in the family of a neighbouring squire, Mr Flinn. The sole record that survives of this experience is that of the quarrel which terminated it at the close of a year. Oliver charged one of the family with cheating at cards, and as the charge led to his resignation or dismissal, he returned home with a good horse under him and £30 in his purse. When someone asked Sheridan Lefanu under similar circumstances, "Why he did not return to his warm home?" he answered, "I did; but I found it too hot to hold me!" And this also was Goldsmith's experience. So warm was his reception that he once more made up his mind to start *via* Cork for America. Once more, however, he was "short-circuited," to borrow an image from the electricians (when the current is diverted and dissipated), for in six weeks he returned home again, all his money spent! His very horse was gone and replaced by a sorry Rosinante he nicknamed "Fiddleback." His mother was furious, to the sad surprise of her faithful son. "And now, my dear mother," he said to her in plaintive remonstrance, "after my having struggled so hard to come home to you, I wonder you are not more rejoiced to see me!" It must be admitted that Goldsmith was given to overdoing this picturesque part of the Prodigal Son. Started again by his long-suffering Uncle Contarine with £50 in his pocket to take him to London and there enable him to enter at the Temple for the study of the law, he

got as far as Dublin, where he lost every farthing of his money in a gambling-house, and was once more returned penniless upon his family's hands. This time, however, he was so far from expecting a welcome that he dared not even write until he was absolutely destitute and starving. Even then he dared write only, penitently and piteously, and only to his uncle, who frankly forgave him all.

This Uncle Contarine is notable not for his unwearyed generosity only, but also for his singular discernment. He seems to have seen the promise—which not even Goldsmith's biographers, with the light of his after performances to guide them, have recognised—that he gave of coming greatness. May I say for my own part that I cannot understand how it has come to be accepted as indisputable that Goldsmith's genius blossomed late and suddenly. "Goldsmith was a plant that flowered late," says Johnson of him to Boswell. "There appeared nothing remarkable about him when he was young." But, as a matter of fact, the one or two letters written at this early period, which have come down to us, are as perfect of their kind as any essay in *The Citizen of the World*. Take, for example, the letter written to his mother, giving a transparently fictitious and facetious account of the adventures which cost him that £30 and a good horse. This letter some of his biographers take seriously; while none of them seems to see in it the conclusive contradiction to the theory that his genius was of slow and late development. So long a letter would, of course, not be worth quoting for the amount of autobiography it contains, as the proportion of fact to fancy in it is probably about that of the proportion of soap to air

in a soap-bubble. But I hope by quoting it at length to convince my readers that the Goldsmith of the *Chinese Letters* was even at this time in evidence for those with any literary discernment.

“MY DEAR MOTHER,—If you will sit down and calmly listen to what I say, you shall be fully resolved in every one of those many questions you have asked me. I went to Cork and converted my horse, which you prize so much higher than Fiddleback, into cash and took my passage in a ship bound for America, and, at the same time, paid the captain for my freight and all the other expenses of the voyage. But it so happened that the wind did not answer for three weeks; and, you know, mother, that I could not command the elements. My misfortune was that, when the wind served, I happened to be with a party in the country, and my friend, the captain, never enquired after me, but set sail with as much indifference as if I had been on board. The remainder of my time I employed in the city and its environs, viewing everything curious, and, you know, no one can starve while he has money in his pocket.

“Reduced, however, to my last two guineas, I began to think of my dear mother and friends whom I had left behind me, and so bought that generous beast Fiddleback, and bade adieu to Cork with only five shillings in my pocket. This, to be sure, was but a scanty allowance for man and horse towards a journey of above a hundred miles; but I did not despair, for I knew I must find friends on the road.

“I recollected particularly an old and faithful acquaintance I made at College, who had often and earnestly pressed me to spend a summer with him,

and he lived but eight miles from Cork. This circumstance of vicinity he would expatiate on to me with peculiar emphasis. 'We shall,' says he, 'enjoy the delights of both city and country, and you shall command my stable and my purse.' However, upon the way, I met a poor woman all in tears, who told me her husband had been arrested for a debt he was not able to pay, and that his eight children must now starve, bereaved as they were of his industry, which had been their only support. I thought myself at home being not far from my good friend's house, and therefore parted with a moiety of all my store; and, pray, mother, ought I not to have given her the other half-crown, for what she got would be of little use to her? However, I soon arrived at the mansion of my affectionate friend, guarded by the vigilance of a huge mastiff, who flew at me and would have torn me to pieces but for the assistance of a woman, whose countenance was not less grim than that of the dog; yet she with great humanity relieved me from the jaws of this Cerberus, and was prevailed on to carry up my name to her master. Without suffering me to wait long, my old friend, who was then recovering from a severe fit of sickness, came down in his night-cap, night-gown, and slippers, and embraced me with the most cordial welcome, showed me in, and after giving me a history of his indisposition, assured me that he considered himself peculiarly fortunate in having under his roof the man he most loved on earth, and whose stay with him must, above all things, contribute to perfect his recovery. I now repented sorely that I had not given the poor woman the other half-crown, as I thought all my bills of humanity would be punctually answered by this worthy man,

I revealed to him my whole soul ; I opened to him all my distresses ; and freely owned that I had but one half-crown in my pocket ; but that now, like a ship after weathering out the storm, I considered myself secure in a safe and hospitable harbour. He made no answer but walked about the room, rubbing his hands as one in deep study. This I imputed to the sympathetic feelings of a tender heart, which increased my esteem for him, and, as that increased, I gave the most favourable interpretation to his silence. I construed it into delicacy of sentiment, as he dreaded to wound my pride by expressing his commiseration in words, leaving his generous conduct to speak for itself.

“ It now approached six o'clock in the evening ; and as I had eaten no breakfast, and as my spirits were raised, my appetite for dinner grew uncommonly keen. At length the old woman came into the room with two plates, one spoon, and a dirty cloth, which she laid upon the table. This appearance, without increasing my spirits, did not diminish my appetite. My protectress soon returned with a small bowl of sago, a small porringer of sour milk, a loaf of stale brown bread, and the heel of an old cheese all over crawling with mites. My friend apologised that his illness obliged him to live on slops, and that better fare was not in the house ; observing at the same time, that a milk diet was certainly the most healthful ; and at eight o'clock he again recommended a regular life, declaring that for his part he would ‘ lie down with the lamb, and rise with the lark.’ My hunger was at this time so exceeding sharp that I wished for another slice of the loaf, but was obliged to go to bed without even that refreshment,

"This lenten entertainment I had received made me resolve to depart as soon as possible. Accordingly, next morning when I spoke of going, he did not oppose my resolution. He rather commended my design, adding some very sage counsel upon the occasion. 'To be sure,' said he, 'the longer you stay away from your mother, the more you will grieve her and your other friends; and possibly they are already afflicted at hearing of this foolish expedition you have made.' Notwithstanding all this, and without any hope of softening such a sordid heart, I again renewed the tale of my distress, and, asking, 'How he thought I could travel above a hundred miles upon one half-crown?' I begged to borrow a single guinea, which I assured him would be repaid with thanks. 'And you know, sir,' said I, 'it is no more than I have done for you.' To which he firmly answered, 'Why, look you, Mr Goldsmith, that is neither here nor there. I have paid you all you ever lent me, and this sickness of mine has left me bare of cash. But I have bethought myself of a conveyance for you. Sell your horse and I will furnish you with a much better one to ride on.' I readily grasped at this proposal, and begged to see the nag; on which he led me to his bedchamber, and from under the bed he pulled out a stout oak stick. 'Here he is,' said he, 'take this in your hand, and it will carry you to your mother's with more safety than such a horse as you ride.' I was in doubt, when I got it into my hand, whether I should not, in the first place, apply it to his pate; but a rap at the street door made the wretch fly to it, and, when I returned to the parlour, he introduced me, as if nothing of the kind had happened, to the gentleman

who entered, as 'Mr Goldsmith, his most ingenious and worthy friend, of whom he had so often heard him speak with rapture.' I could scarcely compose myself, and must have betrayed indignation in my mien to the stranger, who was a counsellor-at-law in the neighbourhood, a man of engaging aspect and polite address.

"After spending an hour, he asked my friend and me to dine with him at his house. This I declined at first, as I wished to have no farther communication with my hospitable friend; but at the solicitation of both I at last consented, determined as I was by two motives—one, that I was prejudiced in favour of the looks and manner of the counsellor; and the other, that I stood in need of a comfortable dinner. And there, indeed, I found everything that I could wish, abundance without profusion, and elegance without affectation. In the evening, when my old friend, who had eaten very plentifully at his neighbour's table, but talked again of lying down with the lamb, made a motion to me for retiring, our generous host requested I should take a bed with him, upon which I plainly told my old friend that he might go home and take care of the horse he had given me, but that I should never re-enter his doors. He went away with a laugh, leaving me to add this to the other little things the counsellor already knew of his plausible neighbour.

"And, now, my dear mother, I found sufficient to reconcile me to all my follies; for here I spent three whole days. The counsellor had two sweet girls to his daughters, who played enchantingly on the harpsichord; and yet it was but a melancholy pleasure I felt the first time I heard them; for that

being the first time also that either of them had touched the instrument since their mother's death, I saw tears in silence trickle down their father's cheeks. I every day endeavoured to go away, but every day was pressed and obliged to stay. On my going, the counsellor offered me his purse, with a horse and servant to convey me home ; but the latter I declined, and only took a guinea to bear my necessary expenses on the road.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

"To Mrs ANNE GOLDSMITH,
"BALLYMAHON."

The passage from *The Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning*, which has been quoted so often in support of the theory that Goldsmith himself was conscious of the slow and late development of his genius, refers only to the distracting and disturbing effects of the passions upon the mind of youth. "I forget," he says in *The Enquiry*, "whether the simile has been used before, but I would compare the man whose youth has been passed in the tranquillity of dispassionate prudence to liquors that never ferment and consequently continue always muddy. Passions may raise a commotion in the youthful breast, but they disturb only to refine it. However this may be, mean talents are often rewarded in College with an easy subsistence." The image had been used before, and in the sense in which his biographers have, I think mistakenly, applied it to Goldsmith. "Wines," says Fuller, "the stronger they be, the more lees they have when they are new. Many boys are muddy-headed till they be clarified with age, and such afterwards prove the best. Bristol diamonds are both bright and

squared and pointed by nature, and yet are soft and worthless ; whereas orient ones in India are rough and rugged naturally. Hard, rugged and dull natures of youth acquit themselves afterwards the jewels of the country." But this was not Goldsmith's use of the simile, nor does it, I think, apply to him in this sense. The genius which won Goldsmith distinction in later life was discernible by those who had eyes for it in his earlier years. There was no market for genius of that sort in College, and it was of no more account in the eyes of men like Theaker Wilder than the pearl "richer than all his tribe" was of value to "the base Indian."

CHAPTER IV

EDINBURGH

OLIVER, having at last exhausted his welcomes at his mother's and at his brother's homes, was fain to fall back upon a hearth and heart whose welcome he had always found, and would never cease to find, cordial. He took up his abode with his Uncle Contarine and there let life for a time glide insensibly away with him in literary converse with his host and in yet pleasanter intercourse with his old playmate and cousin, Jane Contarine. It was here and then that a word spoken by another cousin, Dean Goldsmith, decided the course and current of his life to its close. May I say, in passing, that a reference Goldsmith made once to this dean has discredited him with readers of Boswell. "When Goldsmith began to rise into notice," says Boswell, "he said he had a brother who was Dean of Durham—a fiction so easily detected that it is wonderful how he should have been so inconsiderate as to hazard it." Wonderful indeed, as in those days the Deanery of Durham was a richer prize than most bishoprics, and the dean of the day was as well known as the primate of the day to any dignitary of the Church; yet it was to a dignitary of the Church that Goldsmith was supposed to have made the boast. However, Boswell has the candour to append the following note, which transfers the reader's wonder to himself. "I am willing to hope that there may have

been some mistake about this boast of Goldsmith's, though I had the anecdote from a dignitary of the Church. Dr Isaac Goldsmith, his near relation, was Dean of Cloyne."

It was this dignitary who discovered, when on a visit with Uncle Contarine, that Goldsmith's true calling was that of a physician, having, I presume, arrived at this conclusion by a process of exhaustion. As Oliver had failed to enter the Church and even to reach the Temple, it followed that, if he was destined for any of the three learned professions, it must be that of physic. While the worthy dean called the tune which Oliver was to dance to next, of course it was the much-enduring Uncle Contarine who had to pay the piper. He refitted him for his third voyage, this time to Edinburgh for the study there of medicine. In Edinburgh Goldsmith at least studied chemistry, a science for which he had always a taste; but he was, as I have already noted, chiefly distinguished for his social success. It was to this he owed his engagement—probably as a tutor—at the Duke of Hamilton's, and because he owed it solely to this he resigned it. "I have spent," he writes to Uncle Contarine, "more than a fortnight every second day at the Duke of Hamilton's, but it seems they like me more as a jester than as a companion, so I disdained so servile an employment." For his social success in Edinburgh we have the unimpeachable evidence of that unsociable knight, Sir John Hawkins, whom his *only* friend in the club, Dr Johnson, thus defends to Dr Burney:—"Sir John, sir, is a very unclubable man. Yet I really believe him to be an honest man at bottom; though to be sure he is rather penurious and he is somewhat mean,

and, it must be owned, he has some degree of brutality, and is not without a tendency to savageness that cannot well be defended." But this genial Sir John admits, however grudgingly, Goldsmith's social success in Edinburgh, which ought to count, if his convivial supremacy in the Ballymahon club goes for nothing. And perhaps the success of his Ballymahon's sallies should no more count than Hamlet's madness, according to the sexton, would count in England, for "there the men are as mad as he." But Scotland is socially the antipodes of Ireland, and therefore Goldsmith's social success both in Ireland and Scotland suggests that he ought to have been a social success everywhere. It is just possible that his failure in the club and in Johnson's society is evidence, not against his sociability, but against that of such companies. The club was probably as sociable a place as a witness-box, where your wits—on your oath—are set against your cross-examiner's, to the enjoyment of the Court. In such a situation a nervous or diffident man will stultify himself repeatedly, in spite of his being ordinarily the reverse of a fool. Surely in an ideally sociable company everyone should be at his ease and no one on his oath; and the mind, like a boy let loose from school, should be at play, and the games should be won or lost as games, and not as battles. Goldsmith probably owed his "Poor Poll" reputation less to his failure to consider his speeches sufficiently than to his failure to consider sufficiently his audience.

But Goldsmith's inconsiderateness in all ways was more Irish than the Irish themselves. On the day of his arrival in Edinburgh, he left his luggage in some lodgings in some street, and then set out to

explore the city, without a thought of noting either number or name of street. When it occurred to him to return home, he was as helpless as was De Quincey under similar circumstances in the same city. By the merest good luck, however, he happened to meet and recognise the porter who had carried his luggage to the lodgings, and from him he learned where he lived. Yet more characteristic was his challenge to some Edinburgh fellow-students to draw lots with any one of them to decide which of the two should treat the entire party to the theatre on the first night of a new play. He had no sooner made the offer than he remembered that he was almost penniless, and that, if the lot had fallen to him, he must pawn his clothes to raise the requisite sum. Dire was his trepidation until the reckless challenge was declined all round.

This may perhaps suggest to my readers that Goldsmith had taken again to the gambling habit at his Uncle Contarine's expense. On the contrary, it must be recorded to his credit that he took so much to heart the expense he had hitherto been to his generous uncle, that he drew upon him now only for incredibly small sums. In a postscript to his first letter to his uncle he writes:—"I draw this time"—8th May—"for £6, and will draw next October for £4, as I was obliged to buy everything since I came to Scotland—shirts not even excepted. I am a little more early the first year than I shall be for the future, for I absolutely will not trouble you before the time hereafter." This works out at about one pound a month. How he contrived to live upon it, even in Edinburgh, is a mystery.

It was not, however, poverty which now, or hereto-

fore or hereafter embittered Goldsmith's life, but an ever-tormenting personal distrust, which poverty of course aggravated. Four months after his arrival in Edinburgh he writes at the close of a charming letter to his old chum, Bob Bryanton: "But how ill, my Bob, does it become me to ridicule women with whom I have scarce any correspondence. There are, 'tis certain, handsome women here; and 'tis certain there are handsome men to keep them company. An ugly and a poor man is society for himself, and such society the world lets me enjoy in great abundance. Fortune has given you circumstances, and nature a person to look charming in the eyes of the fair world. Nor do I envy my dear Bob such blessings, while I may sit down and laugh at the world and at myself, the most ridiculous object in it."

Here you have the real Goldsmith, very different from the Boswellian and popular conception of him as a kind of ridiculous Bottom, eager to play every part and confident of playing all well. On the contrary, he was continually and acutely conscious of his personal and other disadvantages, and his very extravagance of dress was itself an evidence, not of conceit, but of its opposite. "Every extravagance in dress," he writes in his third *Letter from a Citizen of the World*, "proceeds from a desire of becoming more beautiful than nature made us, and this is so harmless a vanity that I not only pardon but approve of it."

In spite of his bitter poverty, Goldsmith was probably as happy in Edinburgh as he would have been anywhere, and, if he quitted it within two years it was less because it was Edinburgh than because

it was not some other place. He was a born Arab,

“Impelled with steps unceasing to pursue
Some fleeting good that mocks me with the view ;
That, like the circle bounding earth and skies,
Allures from far, yet, as I follow, flies ;
My fortune leads to traverse realms alone,
And find no spot of all the world my own.”

He may, however, have persuaded himself, as he tries in the following letter to persuade his uncle, that it was not restlessness, but an insatiable thirst for medical knowledge, which the limited therapeutical lore of Edinburgh had only whetted, that drove him to Paris—this and the discovery that the Paris professors spoke French, and not, as in other Continental Universities, Latin.

“MY DEAR UNCLE,—After having spent two winters at Edinburgh, I now prepare to go to France the 10th of next February. I have seen all that this country can exhibit in the medical way, and therefore intend to visit Paris, where the great Mr Farhein, Petit, and Du Hammel de Monceau instruct their pupils in all the branches of Medicine. They speak French, and consequently I shall have much the advantage of most of my countrymen, as I am perfectly acquainted with that language, and few who leave Ireland are so.”

But he hopes to exhaust even the medical lore of Paris, and having drawn dry that *Alma Mater*, to perfect his study at Leyden.

“Since I am on so pleasing a topic as self-applause,” he continues, “give me leave to say that the circle of science which I have run through before I undertook the study of physic,

is not only useful, but absolutely necessary to the making of a skilful physician. Such sciences enlarge our understanding and sharpen our sagacity ; and what is a practitioner without both but an empiric, for never yet was a disorder found entirely the same in two patients. A quack, unable to distinguish the particularities in each disease, prescribes at a venture. If he finds such a disorder may be called by the general name of fever, for instance, he has a set of remedies which he applies to cure it ; nor does he desist till his medicines run out, or his patient has lost his life. But the skilful physician distinguishes the symptoms ; manures the sterility of nature, or prunes her luxuriance ; nor does he depend so much upon the efficacy of medicines as upon their proper application. I shall spend this spring and summer in Paris, and, at the beginning of next winter, go to Leyden. The great Albinus is still alive there, and 'twill be proper to go, though only to have it said that we have studied in so famous an University."

I must admit that this letter sounds something like the prospectus of a Mexican mine, describing the rich results and the richer promise of the workings so far for the beguilement of the unwary investor. Nor is the essential point of such a prospectus—the amount of capital needed for the exploitation of the mine—lacking :—"As I shall not have another opportunity of receiving money from your bounty till my return to Ireland, so I have drawn from the last sum that I hope I shall ever trouble you for ; 'tis twenty pounds." Here, however, it is only fair to remember two things about Goldsmith—that he was the most sanguine of

prospectors, and that no one took him in—and he was for ever being taken in—more often or more completely than himself. He had persuaded himself of what he here sought to persuade his uncle, that nothing gathers more moss than a rolling stone.

Unlike most wastrels too, Goldsmith was grateful—grateful even to the point of ceasing to be a burden to his benefactor! This £20 was the last penny he ever asked or received from his uncle, for he endured the most poignant privations sooner than apply to him again. The gratitude he expresses at the close of this letter was not for favours to come:—"And now, dear sir, let me here acknowledge the humility of the station in which you found me; let me tell you how I was despised by most and hateful to myself. Poverty, hopeless poverty was my lot, and melancholy was beginning to make me her own when you—but I stop here!"

CHAPTER V

A PHILOSOPHIC VAGABOND

GOLDSMITH'S biographers have been much exercised about the strange tale he tells his Uncle Contarine in his next letter. They would fain believe that it had at least some foundation in fact. For my own part, I cannot help thinking the letter "All lies frae end to end." If, however, it is not all true or true at all, its autobiographic value is still great—even greater perhaps than if it was an absolutely veracious account of what befell him; since what a man is matters more autobiographically, than what he does, or what he suffers. I fear the tale is from end to end an ingenious invention to account for the loss of all his money and the change of all his plans. The truth seems to be that the pitiable shifts and subterfuges of poverty had naturally and almost necessarily demoralised Goldsmith. Extreme poverty, or rather say, absolute destitution, through losing a man the respect of others, often costs him the loss of his own. He finds he must either bend or break; then, if he lives and bends, and can live only through bending, his self-respect suffers. Mr Forster is shocked by Goldsmith's confession to his brother-in-law—"There is hardly a kingdom in Europe in which I am not a debtor." But, in the first place, Mr Forster omits, I cannot imagine why, the mitigating context of this confession. "I have already dis-

charged my most threatening and pressing demands, for we must be just before we can be grateful." And, in the second place, Mr Forster fails to make in imagination due allowance for the demoralisation of Goldsmith's circumstances.

"Ye see your state wi' theirs compared,
And shudder at the niffer,
But cast a moment's fair regard,
What makes the mighty differ?"

The real wonder is that Goldsmith's nature was—not so much—but so little "subdued to what it worked in." To spend the greater part of your life in such desperate straits and amongst such demoralising associates, and keep yet so pure in heart, so guileless in spirit, so gentle, generous and chivalrous in character—that is the real wonder.

But to run such a gauntlet without scars being left on your character would be almost impossible, and Goldsmith did not pass through it unscathed. If, therefore, the following account is from end to end an invention, devised to account for the loss of his money and the change of his plans, it probably was because the truth was too like that old Dublin gambling escapade to be told to his uncle without insupportable shame.

"DEAR SIR,—I suppose by this time I am accused of either neglect or ingratitude and my silence imputed to my usual slowness of writing. But, believe me, sir, when I say that till now I had not an opportunity of sitting down with that ease of mind which writing required. You may see by the top of the letter that I am at Leyden; but of my journey hither you must be informed. Sometime after the receipt of your last I embarked for Bourdeaux on board a Scotch ship

called the *St Andrews*, Captain John Wall, master. The ship made a tolerable appearance, and, as another inducement, I was let to know that six agreeable passengers were to be my companions. Well, we were but two days at sea when a storm drove us into a city of England called Newcastle-on-Tyne. We all went ashore to refresh us after the fatigues of our voyage. Seven men and I were one day on shore, and, on the following evening, as we were all very merry, the room door bursts open ; enters a sergeant and twelve grenadiers with their bayonets screwed, and puts us all under the King's arrest. It seems my company were Scotchmen in the French service, and had been in Scotland to enlist soldiers for the French army. I endeavoured all I could to prove my innocence ; however, I remained in prison with the rest a fortnight, and with difficulty got off even then. Dear sir, keep this still a secret, or at least say it was for debt ; for, if it were once known at the University, I should hardly get a degree. But hear how Providence interposed in my favour. The ship was gone on to Bourdeaux before I got from prison, and was wrecked at the mouth of the Garonne and every one of the crew drowned. It happened the last great storm. There was ship at that time ready for Holland ; I embarked and, in nine days, thank my God, I arrived safely at Rotterdam, whence I travelled by land to Leyden, and whence I now write."

Here also, I think, Goldsmith's biography is to be found written rather in his fiction than in his "facts" —in the "History of a Philosophic Vagabond" in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, rather than in this account by the Philosophic Vagabond of his adventures to

his uncle. Goldsmith admitted more than once at Reynolds' dinner-table that the "Wanderings of a Philosophic Vagabond" was a transcript, often accurate down to the minutest details, of his own adventures. Conversely it is to me absolutely certain that, if the stirring adventures he describes in this letter had really occurred to him, they would have found their place in the Philosophic Vagabond's narrative in *The Vicar of Wakefield*. What does find a place there is so much more in keeping with Goldsmith's character and with probability, that I quote it here as approximately if not literally autobiographic.

"I fairly therefore divided my last half-guinea, one-half of which went to be added to his thirty thousand pounds, and with the other half I resolved to go to the next tavern, to be there more happy than he. As I was going out with that resolution, I was met at the door by the captain of a ship, with whom I had formerly some little acquaintance, and he agreed to be my companion over a bowl of punch. As I never chose to make a secret of my circumstances, he assured me that I was upon the very point of ruin, in listening to the office-keeper's promises; for that he only designed to sell me to the plantations. 'But,' continued he, 'I fancy you might by a much shorter voyage be very easily put into a genteel way of bread. Take my advice. My ship sails to-morrow for Amsterdam; what if you go in her as a passenger? The moment you land, all you have to do is to teach the Dutchmen English, and I'll warrant you'll get pupils and money enough. I suppose you understand English,' added he, 'by this time, or the deuce is in it.' I confidently assured him of that; but expressed a doubt whether the Dutch would be willing to learn

English. He affirmed with an oath that they were fond of it to distraction ; and upon that affirmation I agreed with his proposal and embarked the next day to teach the Dutch English in Holland. The wind was fair, our voyage short, and, after having paid my passage with half my moveables, I found myself fallen, as from the skies, a stranger in one of the principal streets of Amsterdam. In this situation I was unwilling to let any time pass unemployed in teaching. I addressed myself therefore to two or three of those I met, whose appearance seemed most promising ; but it was impossible to make ourselves mutually understood. It was not till this very moment I recollected that, in order to teach Dutchmen English, it was necessary that they should teach me Dutch. How I came to overlook so obvious an objection is to me amazing ; but certain it is I overlooked it."

No one will doubt at least that this practical bull—of going to Holland to teach the Dutch English without reflecting that they must first teach him Dutch—was really made by Goldsmith himself. After all, the idea is not so absurd as it sounds ; since as every schoolboy knows, no foreign teacher in any country need know its language thoroughly in order to impart to its natives a thorough knowledge of his own. As a matter of fact, indeed, Goldsmith did contrive to keep body and soul together in Leyden by teaching the natives English. It was about all that he succeeded in doing there, and perhaps all that he cared much to do there. He took all things easy and his medical studies easiest of all. He characteristically threw away a happy chance he once had of prosecuting these medical studies to a successful close.

"One morning," says the "Percy Memoir," he came to a fellow-student of his, Dr Ellis, afterwards clerk to the Irish House of Commons, "one morning Goldsmith came to him with his pockets literally full of money, and with exultation counted out to him a large sum which he had won the preceding evening. Dr Ellis earnestly pressed him to play no more, but to secure his present gains as a fund for completing his medical studies. Oliver, who could always see what was right, though he could not always pursue it, highly approved this advice, and declared it his firm resolution to make it the rule of his future conduct. But the seductions of the gaming table were irresistible, and he was soon after stripped of every shilling."

Whence some of Goldsmith's biographers have inferred that he was a confirmed gambler, and no doubt, he had that faith in fortune which a man with "a knack at hoping" always has; but he was no more a confirmed gambler than he was a confirmed anything else. He was as mere a creature of impulse and of the moment as any child. The only thing certain about such gambling gains was that they must be spent forthwith; but whether they would be gambled or given away was as uncertain as a throw of the dice. You need go no further than Dr Ellis' account of Goldsmith's final farewell to Leyden to be assured of this; for before he had been a year in the place, his Arab instinct drove him afield again, and he quitted the University, so far as progress in his medical studies was concerned, pretty much as he entered it. His new idea was nothing less than a tramp on foot through Europe; and to equip himself for the adventure he borrowed

a small sum of money from Dr Ellis. As usual, however, most of the money was gone before the journey was begun. He had not gone many steps from Dr Ellis' door when the sight of some tulip bulbs in a florist's garden reminded him of his Uncle Contarine's love of flowers, and he then and there spent all but a few shillings of what he had just borrowed for his European tour in the purchase and despatch to Ireland of the roots! As the tulip mania was then at its height in Holland, the money thus spent would probably have taken him well on his way to Paris, but the pleasure the present would give his kindly uncle was to Goldsmith well worth the cost of all the privations of his penniless journey.

But what put into Goldsmith's head this wild idea of a tramp through Europe? Here, as ever, we find the answer, not directly in his letters, but indirectly in his works. About a fourth of the fifth chapter of his *Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning* is most disproportionately taken up with a sympathetic account of the career of the Norwegian author, Baron Holberg. Holberg, the son of a private soldier, educated himself in childhood by begging bread and learning from school to school, and, in manhood, by begging bread and gathering knowledge in a tramp through Europe. If you will compare the account of Holberg's enterprise in Goldsmith's *Enquiry* with the account in *The Vicar of Wakefield* of the wanderings of the Philosophic Vagabond, you will recognise where he got and how closely he followed his model. The two passages are well worth mutual comparison, if only in illustration of Goldsmith's habit of using up his own experiences in his works.

"But his ambition," he says of Baron Holberg in his *Enquiry*, "was not to be restrained, or his thirst for knowledge satisfied until he had seen the world. Without money, recommendations, or friends, he undertook to set out upon his travels and make the tour of Europe on foot. A good voice and a trifling skill in music were the only finances he had to support an undertaking so extensive; so he travelled by day and at night sung at the door of peasants' houses to get himself a lodging. In this manner, while yet very young, Holberg passed through France, Germany, and Holland; and coming over to England took up his residence for two years in the University of Oxford."

Let us now listen to the Philosophic Vagabond's account of his tramp:—"I was now too far from home to think of returning, so I resolved to go forward. I had some knowledge of music, with a tolerable voice, and now turned what was once my amusement into a present means of subsistence. I passed among the harmless peasants of Flanders, and among such of the French as were poor enough to be very merry; for I ever found them sprightly in proportion to their wants. Whenever I approached a peasant's house toward nightfall, I played one of my most merry tunes, and that procured me not only a lodging, but subsistence for the next day."

"*I ever found them sprightly in proportion to their wants*" should be underlined for those readers who cannot bear to think of the many and poignant—and they were many and poignant—privations of Goldsmith throughout this pilgrimage. Often the man "that no revenue hath but his good spirits," owes his good spirits to his lack of revenue, to his

lack at least of what goes with a revenue—care and envy. For the poor man does not envy the rich so much as the rich man envies the richer—at all events in England where, as Max O'Rell used to say, "everyone is equal to his superior and superior to his equal." The eastern apologue of the unhappy emperor who was promised happiness when he found a happy man and wore his shirt, and who, when he came at last upon an absolutely happy man, found him shirtless, would apply especially to Goldsmith. He was far happier in these days, when he knew as little as the bird on the bough where to-morrow's breakfast would come from, than he was in the days described by Glover, when, in spite of the big income he was earning, he would spring up to quit the most congenial company to go home and brood by himself over his troubles. In these tramp days he had still his knack at hoping that to-morrow would be as to-day and much more abundant. Speaking of himself in these days he says: "No person ever had a better knack at hoping than I. The less kind I found fortune at one time, the more I expected from her at another; and, being now at the bottom of her wheel, every new revolution might lift but could not depress me. I proceeded, therefore, towards London, no way uneasy about to-morrow, but cheerful as the birds that carolled by the road." And here, again, is his description in retrospect to Cooke: "He frequently," says Cooke, "used to talk of his distresses on the Continent—such as living on the hospitalities of the friars in convents, sleeping in barns, and picking up a kind of mendicant livelihood by the German flute—with much pleasantry."

Living in one word, on hope, which, says Bacon,

"is a good breakfast, but a bad supper." But in the prosperous days of which Glover spoke, he had it for supper, or rather he had it not at all. "What makes old age so sad," says the Persian poet, Jami, "is not that our joys, but that our hopes cease"; and in this, as well as in many other respects Goldsmith, in his prosperous days, was a prematurely old man. But in his youth certainly Goldsmith had the secret of that slave he saw at Antwerp and described in *The Bee* :—"He was maimed, deformed, and chained; obliged to toil from the appearance of day till nightfall, and condemned to this for life; yet with all these circumstances of apparent wretchedness he sang, would have danced, but that he wanted a leg, and appeared the merriest, happiest man of all the garrison."

Even Goldsmith's philosophy, however, even in these buoyant days, was not proof against one experience of his during his Continental tour—bear-leading—probably because of the extreme mutual incompatibility between the bear and his keeper. A miser and a prodigal could hardly hit it off together, and the following autobiographic passage suggests that two more mutually antipathetic young men than Goldsmith and his charge were never paired together :—

"I was employed as a travelling tutor by a gentleman who brought his ward to Paris in order to set him forward on a tour through Europe. I was to be the young gentleman's governor, but with a proviso that he should always be permitted to govern himself. My pupil, in fact, understood the art of guiding in money concerns much better than I. He was heir to a fortune of two hundred thousand

pounds, left him by an uncle in the West Indies; and his guardian, to qualify him for the management of it, had bound him apprentice to an attorney. Thus avarice was his prevailing passion; all his questions on the road were, how much money might be saved; which was the least expensive course of travelling; whether anything could be bought that would turn to account when disposed of again in London. Such curiosities on the way as could be seen for nothing, he was ready enough to look at; but, if the sight of them was to be paid for, he usually asserted that he had been told they were not worth seeing. He never paid a bill that he would not observe how amazingly expensive travelling was! And all this though he was not yet twenty-one! When arrived at Leghorn, as we took a walk to look at the port and shipping, he enquired the expense of a passage by sea home to England. This, he was informed, was but a trifle compared to his returning by land; he was, therefore, unable to withstand the temptation. So paying me the small part of my salary that was due, he took leave, and embarked with only one attendant for London."

Besides begging and bear-leading, Goldsmith mentions a third resource, which Boswell wittily describes as "disputing his passage through Europe." "I now therefore," that is after his young hopeful had left him stranded at Leghorn, "was left once more upon the world at large; but then it was a thing I was used to. However, my skill in music could avail me nothing in a country where every peasant was a better musician than I; but by this time I had acquired another talent which answered my purpose as well, and this was a skill in disputation. In all

the foreign universities and convents there are upon certain days philosophical theses maintained against every adventitious disputant; for which, if the champion opposes with any dexterity, he can claim a gratuity in money, a dinner and a bed for night. In this manner, therefore, I fought my way towards England; walked along from city to city; examined mankind more nearly; and, if I may so express it, saw both sides of the picture."

Upon this autobiographic passage I should like to be allowed to make two remarks in correction of the popular estimate of Goldsmith as muddle-headed, unready, irreflective and unobservant. He could not have been the muddle-headed and unready creature suggested by Macaulay's "muddy river" simile, if he could thus "dispute his passage through Europe"; nor, again, could he have been as irreflective and unobservant as Macaulay describes him in another passage, and as, indeed, he is popularly supposed to be, if in this tramp he really did "examine mankind more nearly" to some purpose. "He had seen much of the world," says Macaulay, "but he had noticed and retained little more of what he had seen than some grotesque incidents and characters which had happened to strike his fancy." Is that so? Where in our literature will you find the national characteristics of the French, Italians, Swiss or Dutch hit off in a few felicitous phrases so accurately and so admirably as in *The Traveller*? Are these pictures of the peoples, painted from what he saw in tramping through their countries for a few weeks, the work of a man "who noticed little more of what he had seen than some grotesque incidents and characters which had happened to strike his fancy"?

Was it a man without observation or reflection who, from what he saw in a tramp through France, predicted the French Revolution a whole generation before its outburst? "The French," he writes in his *Chinese Letters*, "are imperceptibly vindicating themselves into freedom. When I consider that those parliaments (the members of which are all created by the court, the presidents of which can only act by immediate direction) presume even to mention privileges and freedom, who, till late, received directions from the throne with implicit humility; when this is considered, I cannot help fancying that the genius of freedom has entered that kingdom in disguise. If they have but three weak monarchs more successively on the throne, the mask will be laid aside, and the country will once more be free."

The truth is, as this and other passages from his essays prove, Goldsmith was so far from being unobservant and irreflective, that he was one of the most observant, reflective, far-sighted and sagacious men of his day.

CHAPTER VI

LONDON

GOLDSMITH'S Grand Tour, which took him a year, gave him probably a truer education than any university could have imparted in five. In February 1755 he quitted Leyden and on 1st February 1756 he landed at Dover. His straits never seemed truly desperate till now. He had not a penny. Neither his music nor his scholarship could get him a supper in any house in England ; while his being a foreigner was as much against him in this country as abroad it was in his favour ; for though Goldsmith, the poet, is English, Goldsmith, the tramp, was Irish, and in those days an Irishman was the least popular of foreigners. In writing of this period to his brother-in law he says : "You may easily imagine what difficulties I had to encounter, left as I was without friends, money or impudence, and that in a country where being born an Irishman was sufficient to keep me unemployed."

In that single fortnight's weary trudge from Dover to London, Goldsmith was probably subjected to more hardship and humiliation than in his year's tramp abroad. In the after days of his prosperity he did not shrink from recalling and from recounting humiliations so abject as his "living among the beggars of Axe Lane"; but of the miseries and mortifications of this tramp to London he never

spoke. Perhaps its least humiliating incident is embalmed in the "History of a Philosophic Vagabond," whose final resource, it will be remembered, was a strolling stage. While, however, the "Philosophic Vagabond" made his appearance as Horatio, Goldsmith's real part according to tradition and to probability was that of a low comedian.

But he reached London at last, at night, destitute and in despair :

"Homeless near a thousand homes he stood

And near a thousand tables pined and wanted food."

Some as great have starved in London ; but none as kindly ; and it is a pain to think that the man who gave his bed-clothes on a bitter night to a beggar, should be without shelter, food, a friend, or a hope in that appalling city. We hardly know more of these terrible days than that he "went under," to use a phrase of dread significance. He sank in deep waters where no ground was, getting his head now and again above the surface for a moment, only to disappear again into those desperate depths. At these emerging moments we see him now usher at a school, so wretched that he taught in it under a feigned name ; now trudging from one apothecary's shop to another, seeking the work of an assistant, of an office-boy, of a mere messenger, and seeking it in vain. At last a kindly chemist, named Jacob, out of sheer pity for his destitution, employed him as an assistant ; an employment which kept him at least alive until an old Edinburgh fellow-student, a Quaker doctor, Sleight, lent a hand with Jacob's to launch him as a physician in the humblest way amongst the poorest people.

I have sometimes thought upon seeing statues to famous men supported by allegorical figures, how much more instructive and striking would be the figures of those who were their real supporters at crises of their lives. It is only after death, and in bronze or marble that the Muses support their children; and I should be glad to see these picturesque pretenders replaced by figures, however homely, of the men who were their real supports in life. Supporting figures of Uncle Contarine, of Henry Goldsmith, of the kindly chemist, Jacob, and of the yet kindlier doctor, Sleigh, would be more to the purpose at the base of a statue of Goldsmith, than all the nine Muses together.

Uncle Contarine is now sunk in senile imbecility, Henry Goldsmith, "passing rich on forty pounds a year," is not rich enough to help; Oliver's brother-in-law Hodson, who because he was rich was dowered with the portions of the poor, also because he was rich declined to give any help. "It is not want, but abundance," says Montaigne, "that creates avarice." Hence it is to strangers we owe it that Oliver Goldsmith did not die of starvation in the streets of London. The kind chemist, Jacob, drew him out of the depths with one hand, and with the other helped Dr Sleigh to establish him in a pauper practice in Southwark. Though it was but two years since Sleigh knew Goldsmith well in Edinburgh, and though the poet took care to present himself to his old fellow-student dressed in his best Sunday apparel, he was not recognised. "Notwithstanding it was Sunday," Goldsmith said afterwards, "and it is to be supposed I was in my best clothes, Sleigh did not know me. Such is the tax the unfortunate

pay to poverty." "However," he added, "when he did make me out, I found his heart as warm as ever, and he shared his purse and friendship with me during his continuance in London."

But even with the help of Sleigh and Jacob and of the title and costume of a physician, Goldsmith did not prosper. A doctor to prosper must seem prosperous, what Carlyle called "gigmanity" is *the* secret of medical success and, according to an old Irish school-fellow, Beatty, Goldsmith failed here. When he met Beatty casually in the street he assured him jauntily, "I am doing very well as a doctor," but all the evidences of success were absent—his suit of green and gold was tarnished and threadbare, and it was obviously weeks since his linen had been to the laundry. At the same time it is well to remember what the poet's biographers seem to forget, that such a man as Goldsmith practising amongst the very poor must himself continue very poor, let his practice be wide as it would. Goldsmith would certainly take no fee from anyone poor as himself, while no less certainly he would share with those poorer than himself the last farthing he had earned as fees from the more prosperous.

Beatty would probably have found him more presentably dressed if another extravagance had not been dearer to Goldsmith than the love of fine clothes—the luxury of doing good. I could never read the famous story of the courteous contest between himself and a patient about the hat which the poor doctor kept pressed close and closer to his breast—to conceal a patch—while the polite patient in vain attempted to relieve him of it—I never could

read this comic-tragic story without feeling that the heart which beat beneath the patch accounted for the shameful shabbiness. There are tears in that story for those who look beneath the worn coat to the worn heart, as sensitive to feel for suffering as to suffer.

It was to his worn face or dress or both that Goldsmith owed his first lowly step upon the ladder of letters. A poor printer patient whom he was attending, struck by the contrast between Goldsmith's miserable appearance and his literary taste and talk, ventured to say to him: "If I were you, doctor, I would go see my master, Mr Richardson. He is a kind man and is very kind in helping clever men. There's Mr Johnson now whom he released from a sponging-house. I am sure he would do anything he could to help you on." Upon this hint Goldsmith called upon the printer's master, Samuel Richardson, the author of perhaps the most entrancing novel ever written, *Clarissa*. It was not, however, to Richardson, the author, that Goldsmith applied for work, but to Richardson, the printer, a business which the novelist carried on in Salisbury Court, and the application resulted in the poet's appointment as reader and corrector of the press. In Richardson's parlour Goldsmith had the advantage of which he speaks in his history of a Philosophic Vagabond, *apropos* those disputations by which he earned bread and board:—"With the members of these establishments I could converse on topics of literature, and then I always forgot the meanness of my circumstances." This advantage he also enjoyed occasionally in Richardson's parlour, where he met and conversed with Young, the poet, and

other men of literary light and leading, till he caught, of course, the infection of authorship.

His first essay in literature was, I need hardly say, a tragedy; since young poets write tragedies as young curates preach about death and as little children revel in Bluebeard tales, because of the tremendous appeal to the imagination of which youth is all compact. But if Goldsmith's first literary attempt was what you would expect from youth, it was made without the usual assurance of youth. I note this, because of the popular impression of Goldsmith as vain and vainglorious. As a matter of fact, he was, as the following account of him given by another old Edinburgh fellow-student, Dr Farr, suggests, the most diffident of men.

"He called upon me," says this Dr Farr, "one morning before I was up, and, on entering the room, I recognised my old acquaintance dressed in a rusty full-trimmed black suit, with his pockets full of papers, which instantly reminded me of the poet in Garrick's farce of *Lethe*. After we had finished our breakfast he drew from his pocket a part of a tragedy, which he said he had brought for my correction. In vain I pleaded inability when he began to read, and every part on which I expressed a doubt as to the propriety was immediately blotted out. I then more earnestly pressed him not to trust to my judgment, but to the opinions of persons better qualified to decide on dramatic composition, on which he told me he had submitted his production, as far as he had written, to Mr Richardson, the author of *Clarissa*, on which I peremptorily declined offering another criticism on the performance. The name and subject of the tragedy have unfortunately

escaped my memory, neither do I recollect with exactness how much he had written, though I am inclined to believe that he had not completed the third act. I never heard whether he afterwards finished it. In this visit I remember his relating a strange quixotic scheme of his he had in contemplation of going to decipher the inscriptions on the *Written Mountains*, though he was altogether ignorant of Arabic, or the language in which they might be supposed to be written. The salary of three hundred pounds per annum which had been left for the purpose was the temptation."

And also, I think, Goldsmith's Arab eagerness to be again on the march. He never could settle down for any time to anything. What but this restlessness and fickleness could have made him exchange his comparatively congenial employment in Richardson's printing-office for the odious drudgery of Peckham School? No one had better or more bitter experience of the miseries of an usher. "I have been," says the Philosophic Vagabond's cousin to him, "an usher at a boarding-school myself, and may I die by an anodyne necklace but I had rather be underturnkey at Newgate. I was up early and late; I was browbeat by the master, hated for my ugly face by the mistress, worried by the boys." Nevertheless his restlessness drove him from the printing-office to Peckham School, where he endured what he has described with a bitterness unprecedented from him in the sixth number of *The Bee*. Of "this poor needy animal," the usher, he says there, "he is the laughing-stock of the school. Every trick is played upon him; the oddity of his manners, his dress, or his language is a fund of eternal ridicule; the master

himself now and then cannot avoid joining in the laugh, and the poor wretch, eternally resenting this ill-usage, seems to live in a state of war with all the family." Indeed, he endured such miseries and mortification at this Peckham school, that he winced as from a whip-lash at any reference to the place. Cooke says, "He would tell many stories of his own distresses, but the little story of Peckham school he always carefully avoided." At the very name of Peckham he would start in after years as at the throb of an old wound. When a friend once happened to use the proverbial phrase, "a holiday at Peckham," Goldsmith turned hotly upon him and asked "if he meant to insult him?" For those who can recall their school-days Goldsmith's wretchedness at Peckham Academy is explained by his gentleness, for the abject Bengali proverb, "He that gives blows is a master; he that gives none is a dog," is the code and creed of schoolboys. "He was very good-natured," testifies of Goldsmith the daughter of the Peckham Principal, Miss Milner, "he told entertaining stories, amused everybody with his flute, and spent his small salary on the day he received it in relieving beggars and buying sweets for the younger class." Can you wonder, then, that one of these youngsters, to whom he was recommending the study of music as a gentlemanly accomplishment, asked with a sneer, "Do *you* call yourself a gentleman?"

From Peckham Academy it was an escape even to become a bookseller's hack, and that bookseller, Griffiths. Griffiths, struck at Mr Milner's dinner-table by Goldsmith's conversation, asked the usher to become a contributor to his *Monthly Review*,

for the remuneration of a small, fixed salary, and his board and lodging. He must indeed have touched bottom at Peckham, if Paternoster Row was an improvement upon it. Here Griffiths bullied him with coarse brutality, Mrs Griffiths starved him, and both did him the insupportable wrong of mutilating and emending his contributions to the *Monthly*. Ten years later when his old College chum, Ned Purdon, dropped dead in Smithfield, Goldsmith in adapting from Swift the epitaph which Swift had adapted from the French, repeated the last line three times :—

“ Here lies poor Ned Purdon, from misery freed,
Who long was a bookseller’s hack ;
He led such a damnable life in this world,
I don’t think he’ll wish to come back.”

Surely the threefold repetition expressed what it expresses in Hebrew—the superlative—and Goldsmith was recalling Griffiths.

CHAPTER VII

GRUB STREET

DISPROPORTIONATE stress has been laid by Macaulay and others upon the effect of patronage on the literature of the days of Queen Anne. Even the half dozen writers paraded as *protégés* would have been neglected had literature been their sole recommendation to their powerful patrons ; while, as *The Dunciad* shows, Grub Street was then as poor, as populous, as despised and almost as despicable as at any other epoch. It was not, however, quite so despicable as in the days in which that "water-fly," Horace Walpole, expressed his amazement that "Young Mr Burke should not have worn off his authorism yet. He thinks there is nothing so charming as writers and to be one. He will know better one of these days." It does not seem to have occurred to this superfine fribble that his own father was chiefly responsible for the degradation of letters at which he sneers. Sir Robert Walpole, like an Eastern well-poisoner, had throughout his long reign poisoned every fount of honour accessible to him ; and had spent in the corruption of men of letters alone, over £50,000. The result was that when Goldsmith entered Grub Street its pens were as venal as the votes of the House of Commons. "An author," says Fielding, writing of this time and state of things, "in a country where there is no public provision for

men of genius, is not obliged to be a more disinterested patriot than any other. Why is he whose livelihood is in his pen, a greater monster in using it to serve himself than he who uses his tongue for the same purpose?" Mr Forster, in commenting upon this passage, lays the stress on its complaint of the national neglect of men of genius; but surely the significance of Fielding's cynical pleading lies in its revelation of universal corruption?

Now these Grub Street pens were at the mercenary service, not only of political partisanship, but also of personal malignity. Pens, like the daggers of Italian bravoës, were on hire to anyone who wished to stab an enemy anonymously in the press; and these daggers were poisoned when the victim happened to be the object of the unsuccessful writer's envious and venomous detestation—the author who had arrived.

This, then, was Goldsmith's Grub Street environment; and I would ask those who have been taught to think of him as "poor Goldy," a creature whose very kindness was a form of weakness, to consider the moral stand he took and stoutly kept in circumstances of such overwhelming temptation.

In the first place, if Goldsmith with his shrinking sensitiveness was a creature of this feeble moral fibre, he must have been spiteful. Weakness of this sort is always spiteful, as the bite of an insect is always poisoned. Yet, though no man was ever more continually and venomously attacked, and though no man ever felt these attacks more sensitively, there is not to be found in all his works one single retort envenomed by vindictiveness. In *Retaliation* he calls himself derisively "magnanimous Goldsmith"; but *Retaliation* itself shows him magnanimous

beyond any author who had such power and such provocation. Those who know anything of the Grub Street of that day, and especially of the scandalous scurrility and savagery of its attacks on Goldsmith, and who, again, realise his quivering sensitiveness to such attacks, will be reminded by his sunny disregard in his writings of the pelting of this pitiless storm of his own fine image of the cliff which,

“Swells from the vale and midway leaves the storm,
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head.”

“The insults,” says Thackeray, “to which Goldsmith had to submit are shocking to read of—slander, contumely, vulgar satire, brutal malignity perverting his commonest motives and actions; he had his share of these and one’s anger is roused at reading of them, as it is at seeing a woman insulted or a child assaulted, at the notion that a creature so very gentle and weak and full of love should have to suffer so.” But Goldsmith, let me add, is not to be pitied merely or merely loved for his gentle sufferance, but to be admired also and perhaps above all—to be admired for the magnanimity with which he disdained to revenge himself. If Goldsmith had been a man of the feeble, febrile moral fibre he is popularly supposed to have been, he would have been womanish in his spitefulness as he certainly was womanly in his sensitiveness.

Now let us look, in the second place, at the moral strength with which he resisted another infection of Grub Street—its venality. As Goldsmith borrowed and accepted money freely from friends—though be it remembered, nothing like so freely as he gave or lent money to anyone and everyone in need, whether

friend or stranger—it has been presumed, as Mr Forster expresses it, that “he was strangely indifferent to such obligations.” But, to begin with, may I say that a man, who makes infinitely less of the obligations he confers, than of the obligations he receives, is not fairly judged by a County Court standard. Again, Goldsmith with his “knack at hoping” always expected that to-morrow would enable him to pay the debts of to-day. Lastly, he showed himself the reverse of indifferent to moral obligations when he was deliberately confronted with them. When the Rev. Dr Scott was sent with a *carte blanche* from the ministry to secure the support of Goldsmith’s pen, the divine was at once amazed and indignant at the poet’s proud refusal. “I found him,” says Dr Scott, “in a miserable set of chambers in the Temple. I told him my authority; I told him that I was empowered to pay most liberally for his exertions; and, would you believe it! he was so absurd as to say, ‘I can earn as much as will supply my wants without writing for any party; the assistance you offer is therefore unnecessary to me.’ And so I left him in his garret!”

The rev. doctor could not contain his contempt for the poet’s imbecility, and it is contempt of this kind from men of this kind that has done much to spread the “poor Goldy” idea of the poet—of men

“Of whom to be dispraised were no small praise.”

There is a third respect in which Goldsmith showed himself unaffected by his environment and independent of his contemporaries that is worth noting, because it also and above all contradicts the popular conception of the poet. The popular conception of Goldsmith is that of a man weak and impression-

able as water—impressionable as the surface of a lake, clouded by every passing cloud, ruffled by every passing breeze, never itself for a moment, but always a reflection of the sky above it, or the hills around it, of the boat upon its surface, or the cattle about its brink. That is the popular conception of Goldsmith, the man. But Goldsmith, the writer, is he as a wave of the sea tossed this way and that by every wind, carried to and fro by every tide, coloured by the cloud above, or by the sand or shingle, rock, or seaweed underneath? On the contrary, he stood up alone against the taste of his day, against its sickly sentiment, against its sickening grossness. I think this contrast is extraordinary, between Goldsmith, the man, who seemed so shallow, weak, impressionable, and dependent to his contemporaries, and Goldsmith, the writer, who took a line of his own, wrote a style of his own, thought, and thought profoundly for himself, and in all his works—in his essays, in his poems, in his plays, and in his novel—made a deliberate and determined stand against the taste of the day. Take his style. Boswell says he modelled his style on that of Johnson! What, of Johnson of whom he said that if he had to make little fishes talk he'd make them talk like whales! In the introduction to *The Bee*, again I have no doubt—though it has escaped notice—that he ridicules Johnson's Gargantuan style under the parable of the man who made a monstrous goitre the fashion in an Alpine district. Passing from the manner to the matter of Goldsmith's work, in his plays he consciously courted failure, and in *The Good-Natured Man* not only courted but almost encountered failure by his deliberate stand against the taste of the day for sentiment. Contrast again,

the divine purity of *The Vicar of Wakefield* with the grossness, the foulness, or the pruriency of contemporary novelists. One has to palliate Richardson's sickly and sickening sentiment, Fielding's grossness, Smollett's foulness, the pruriency and impurity of Sterne, by the plea of the demoralisation of their environment. Was the environment of Goldsmith less demoralising? Let me contrast him here for a moment with Sterne, because each has written but one novel, and also because I have the precedent of Thackeray for taking them together. Suppose you read their two novels, *Tristram Shandy* and *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and knew nothing of either author but what you might infer from his work. Would you not then have inferred that Sterne's experience must have been Goldsmith's, and Goldsmith's Sterne's? Would you not have thought that Goldsmith all his life must have been secluded in Sterne's Yorkshire vicarage, out of reach, out of sight and sound of the world's wickedness; and that Sterne must have been exposed to Goldsmith's degrading Grub Street and tramp experiences? For in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, while goodness and all the sweet influences that radiate from goodness seem drawn to the life and from the life, its improbable wickedness might seem the invention of an imagination innocent of evil as a girl's. *The Vicar of Wakefield*, in fact, shows against contemporary novels like a violet among the coarse growths of the hedgerow, "Fair as a star when *only one* is shining in the sky."

A Goldsmith who made and kept so stout and consistent a stand against the venality, the scurrility, the ferocity of the Grub Street of his day, and who deliberately courted and almost encountered failure

in his plays and in his novel by declining to pander to contemporary taste for sickly sentiment or sickening grossness, is certainly not the shallow, feeble, impressionable creature of the popular imagination.

Yet Goldsmith's experiences of Grub Street were sufficiently embittering and debasing, and sufficiently humiliating also to break any spirit. Griffiths bullied him brutally, Mrs Griffiths starved him systematically, while from both he had to submit to the more intolerable grievance of the amendment, mutilation, and even, so to say, the adulteration of his work for the *Monthly Review*; since not Griffiths only but Mrs Griffiths insisted upon the interpolation of purple passages of their own in his articles. Griffiths' scorn for Goldsmith at this time may be inferred from his contemptuous references to him in the *Review* immediately after the poet's death, when his name was on every other lip as the man "who had left hardly any species of writing untouched, and who had touched nothing that he did not adorn." "Superintend the *Monthly Review*!" exclaimed Griffiths in derisive allusion to the report that Goldsmith had had something to do with the management of that periodical. "The doctor," admits Griffiths magnanimously, "had his merits as a man of letters; but, alas! those who knew him must smile at the idea of such a superintendent of a concern which most obviously required some degree of prudence as well as a competent acquaintance with the world. It is, however, true that he had for a while a seat at our board; and that, so far as his knowledge of books extended, he was not an unuseful assistant." If Griffiths could speak of Goldsmith in this tone of contemptuous patronage as — "a not unuseful assistant" — when

the poet's fame was universally and reverentially acknowledged, his scorn of him as bookseller's hack in these days of his Grub Street obscurity must have been biting and bitter indeed.

The inevitable rupture came and Goldsmith went under once more. For months after the breach with Griffiths he seems to have got little or nothing to do, and we catch a glimpse of him in these dire straits through the disillusioned eyes of his brother Charles. Charles, having heard of his brother Oliver's engagement to the great Griffiths, of his contributions to the famous *Monthly Review* and of his association with the literary lions of the day, thought he had nothing to do but to come to London to be put by his prosperous brother in the way of making an immediate fortune. He came to London accordingly to find Oliver in a garret in Salisbury Square. As the boy looked round the room, bare of all furniture, with wide eyes and gaping mouth, Oliver cried cheerily: "All in good time, my boy, all in good time! I shall be richer by and by. Addison, let me tell you, wrote his poem of the *Campaign* in a garret in the Haymarket, three stories high; and you see, I have not come to that yet, for I have only got to the second storey." Charles, however, probably thinking that if it took his brother so many years to reach a second-floor garret like this, his progress to the ground floor would not be worth waiting for, decided to quit London and to seek his fortune in Jamaica.

To this visit of Charles' we owe an interesting letter of Oliver's to his brother-in-law, Hodson. Charles told his brother that Hodson had tried but failed to get up a family subscription four years before to

relieve Oliver's pressing distresses. Though Hodson's zeal in the cause could not have been fervent, since he, the only rich connection of the family, gave nothing himself, and left Oliver's distressful letter unanswered, yet the poet thus thanks him with a gratitude so disproportionate as to seem almost sarcastic for this vain effort to be vicariously charitable :—

“DEAR SIR,—It may be four years since my last letters went to Ireland, and to you in particular. I received no answer; probably because you never wrote to me. My brother, Charles, however, informs me of the fatigue you were at in soliciting a subscription to assist me, not only among my friends and relations, but acquaintances in general. Though my pride might feel some repugnance at being thus relieved, yet my gratitude can suffer no diminution. How much am I obliged to you—to them—for such generosity, or (why should not your virtues have their proper name) for such charity to me at that juncture. Sure I am born to ill-fortune to be so much a debtor and unable to repay. But to say no more of this; too many professions of gratitude are often considered as indirect petitions for future favours. Let me only add that my not receiving that supply was the cause of my present establishment in London.”

This disproportionate gratitude sounds sarcastic, but was fervently sincere. The man who makes least of the favour he confers, makes most of the favour he receives; while no one expects more than he from whom nothing is to be expected. “The selfish man,” says Swift, “complains most of the selfishness of others—just as the fat man in a crowd

complains most of the crush to which he contributes most." On the other hand the little man who is used to being shoved aside, is grateful when he is not crushed in the crowd to death. Then, again, Goldsmith when he wrote this grateful letter was so destitute and desolate that the thought of any kindness, however unsubstantial, touched him deeply. The description he proceeds to give of his circumstances is roseate compared with the reality:—

"I suppose you desire to know my present situation. As there is nothing in it at which I should blush, or which mankind could censure, I see no reason for making it a secret. In short, by a very little practice as a physician, and a very little reputation as a poet, I make a shift to live. Nothing is more apt to introduce us to the gates of the Muses than poverty, but it were well if it only left us at the door. The mischief is, it sometimes chooses to give us its company at the entertainment; and Want, instead of being gentleman-usher, often turns master of the ceremonies. Thus upon hearing I write, no doubt you imagine I starve; and the name of an author naturally reminds you of a garret. In this particular I do not think proper to undeceive my friends. But, whether I eat or starve, live in a first floor, or four pairs of stairs high, I still remember *them* with ardour; nay, my very country comes in for a share of my affection."

This is not an absolutely encouraging account of his circumstances, but compared with the reality it was roseate. At this time Goldsmith made as little by his practice as a physician as he made by his

reputation as a poet, which was far from being an article negotiable for bread.

Goldsmith closes the letter with a contrast between the real Ireland as he knew it and the Ireland of his London day-dreams, a contrast worth noting by those who doubt that Lissoy could have been sublimated by the heat of a poet's imagination into Auburn:—

“Unaccountable fondness for the country, this *Maladie du Pays*, as the French call it! Unaccountable that he should still have an affection for a place who never received when in it above common civility; who never brought anything out of it except his brogue and his blunders. Surely my affection is equally ridiculous with the Scotchman's, who refused to be cured of the itch, because it made him unco thoughtful of his wife and bonny Inverary. But to be serious; let me ask myself what gives me a wish to see Ireland again? The country is a fine one, perhaps? No. The conversation there is generally made up of a smutty toast or a bawdy song; the vivacity supported by some humble cousin who had just folly enough to earn his dinner. Then, perhaps, there is more wit and learning among the Irish? Oh, Lord, no! There has been more money spent in encouragement of the Padareen Mare there one season than given in rewards to learned men since the time of Ussher. All their productions in learning amount to perhaps a translation or a few tracts in divinity; and all their productions in wit to just nothing at all. Why the plague, then, so fond of Ireland? Then all at once, because you, my dear friend, and a few more, who are exceptions to the general picture, have a residence there. This it is

that gives me all the pangs I feel in separation. I confess I carry this spirit sometimes to the souring the pleasures I at present possess. If I go to the opera where Signora Columba pours out all the mazes of melody, I sit and sigh for Lissoy fireside, and 'Johnny Armstrong's Last Good-night,' from Peggy Golden. If I climb Hampstead Hill, than where Nature never exhibited a more magnificent prospect, I confess it fine; but then I had rather be placed on the little mount before Lissoy gate and there take in to me the most pleasing horizon in Nature."

At the very close of the letter he expresses a hope to be able to revisit Ireland in the following year—a "retreat from care that never would be his."

That is a brave and cheery letter considering the circumstances under which it was written, for they were so desperate that Goldsmith soon after had to return to the Peckham Academy. He had now resigned all hope of making a livelihood or a reputation by writing, and the only work—a translation from the French—which he could dispose of to Griffiths, he published pseudonymously. Here, then, at the age of thirty, he stands, if he only knew it, at the parting of the ways. He strained every exertion of his own and every influence of his friends to be put upon the wrong road; but fortunately at this crisis, his medical incapacity was to do literature a greater service than his literary capacity had done it hitherto.

Dr Milner, the Principal of Peckham Academy, secured for him the nomination of medical officer to a factory on the coast of Coromandel; but after Goldsmith had made, with feverish energy and excitement,

every provision and preparation in his power to equip him for the appointment, the nomination was cancelled. It was cancelled, beyond a doubt, because of Goldsmith's medical incompetence, while that incompetence itself was no less indubitable. For, when he presented himself shortly afterwards for examination as a hospital mate—the last resource of the dregs of the Faculty—the only candidates who were rejected out of a crowd were Goldsmith and another.

If, however, literature owes much to the defeat of this forlorn hope, it owes also something to the hope itself; since the *Enquiry into the State of Polite Learning* was written to provide funds for his appointment warrant and for his outfit. "The Ugly Duckling," in a desperate effort to escape death by a short flight, discovered and disclosed its swan's pinions; and Goldsmith's *Enquiry*, written only to secure the means of escape from literature, London and starvation, was a revelation both to himself and to the world of unsuspected powers of sustained flight. *Eventus stultorum magister*; and under that master's guidance it is easy now to recognise in the letters written to his Irish relations about the *Enquiry*, the easy grace and genial charm of that work. The gentlemen, however, to whom they were written, were so far from discerning in these letters even a promise of success, that one and all left them unanswered. But it must be admitted that Goldsmith's endless and hopeless failures might shake any faith in any success for him; while the literary success promised by his letters in those days seems to mean

"Toil, envy, want, the patron and the gaol."

CHAPTER VIII

“THERE’S FLESH ON HIS BONES YET”

AMONG these unacknowledged letters written to his relatives to get Irish subscriptions to the *Enquiry* (in order to meet thereby the expenses of his expected Coromandel appointment), was the following to his brother-in-law, Hodson. It illustrates Southey’s saying: “Letters often tell more of the character of the man they are to be read by, than of him who writes them.”

“I suppose you have heard of my intention of going to the East Indies. The place of my destination is one of the factories on the coast of Coromandel, and I go in quality of physician and surgeon, for which the Company has signed my warrant, which has already cost me ten pounds. I must also pay fifty pounds for my passage, and ten pounds for my sea stores; and the other incidental expenses of my equipment will amount to £60 or £70 more. The salary is but trifling, namely, £100 *per annum*; but the other advantages, if a person be prudent, are considerable. The practice of the place, if I am rightly informed, generally amounts to not less than one thousand pounds *per annum*, for which the appointed physician has an exclusive privilege. This, with the advantages resulting from trade, and the high interest which money bears, viz., £20 per cent., are the inducements which

persuade me to undergo the fatigues of the sea, the dangers of war, and the still greater dangers of the climate; which induce me to leave a place where I am every day gaining friends and esteem, and where I might enjoy all the conveniences of life. I am certainly wrong not to be contented with what I already possess, trifling as it is; for should I ask myself one serious question—‘What is it I want?’—what can I answer? My desires are as capricious as the big-bellied woman’s who longed for a piece of her husband’s nose. I have no certainty it is true; but why cannot I do as some men of more merit, who have lived on more precarious terms? Scarron used jestingly to call himself the Marquis of Quenault, which was the name of the bookseller who employed him; and why may not I assert my privilege and quality on the same pretensions? Yet, upon deliberation, whatever airs I give myself on this side of the water, my dignity, I fancy, would be evaporated before I reached the other. I know you have in Ireland a very indifferent idea of the man who writes for bread; though Swift and Steele did so in the earliest part of their lives. You imagine, I suppose, that every author by profession lives in a garret, wears shabby clothes and converses with the meanest company. Yet I do not believe there is one single writer, who has abilities to translate a French novel, that does not keep better company, wear finer clothes, and live more genteelly than many who pride themselves for nothing else in Ireland. I confess it again, my dear Dan, that nothing but the wildest ambition could prevail on me to leave the enjoyment of the refined conversation which I am sometimes permitted to partake in, for uncertain fortune and a paltry show.

You cannot conceive how I am sometimes divided. To leave all that is dear to me gives me pain ; but when I consider I may possibly acquire a genteel independence for life, when I think of that dignity which philosophy claims to raise itself above contempt and ridicule ; when I think thus, I eagerly long to embrace every opportunity of separating myself from the vulgar as much in my circumstances, as I am already in my sentiments."

This letter recalls the glowing accounts Chatterton wrote home of the prospect before him when the only prospect before him was suicide. Contrast it with the letter written at the same time and with the same object to his cousin, Jane Lawder, daughter of his earliest and stanchest benefactor, Uncle Contarine, a letter in which he speaks of having "starved in those streets where Butler and Otway starved before him," and you will see that Goldsmith, in writing, had to calculate the special consideration likely to weigh with each correspondent. Such men as Mills and Hodson, like Johnson's patron, offer help to a drowning man only when he has struggled to bank. Goldsmith's pride too, no less than his prudence, made him, in his letters to such men, deride as preposterously Irish the idea that "every author by profession lives in a garret and wears shabby clothes" ; at a time when he was himself absolutely starving in such a garret and in clothes so shabby that he could issue forth in them only at nightfall. Indeed, when the Coromandel appointment fell through and left him so destitute and desperate that he tried for the squalid situation of hospital mate, he had to pledge his brains to Griffiths to secure a decent

suit of clothes in which to present himself for the examination. On the condition of Goldsmith's writing four reviews for the *Monthly*, Griffiths became security to the tailor for this suit, which was either to be returned or paid for within a set time. But by that time the clothes were pledged to a pawnbroker and the books (sent for review) to a friend!

Four days after the failure of his last hope—the hospital mate appointment—his landlady burst weeping into Goldsmith's garret to say that her husband had been dragged off to gaol for debt. At once and of course Goldsmith stripped himself of the new suit, resumed his rags and hurried off to a pawnbroker's to raise as much upon the clothes as would release his landlord from gaol. A week later, under pressure of absolute starvation, he borrowed from a friend, upon the security of the volumes he had just reviewed for the *Monthly*, enough money to keep him alive for a few days. These two unfortunate transactions probably came to Mrs Griffiths' knowledge, for hard upon the deposit of the volumes, came a letter from Griffiths demanding at once either the return of the clothes and of the books, or immediate payment for both. Goldsmith wrote appealingly to implore some days' grace, which Griffiths refused in a rejoinder bristling with the most brutal insults and with threats of prosecution.

Nothing in Goldsmith's pathetic history is more piteous than his reply to this ruffianly letter. Mr Forster, who possessed the original, says the very writing is pathetic, it so betrays the wretched writer's agitation. It is the letter of a broken man, broken physically and mentally by despair. Since he had lost his last hope of the appointment as hospital

mate, he had literally starved; for now even the forlorn resource of the Peckham Academy was closed to him through the death of Dr Milner. With mind and body thus weakened, he broke down under the lash of Griffiths' ruffianly insolence; for it must always be remembered about Goldsmith that his heart was as sensitive to suffer as to feel for suffering. The pathos of this incident, and indeed of Goldsmith's life, lies in this—that he could not resist the sight of suffering, but must at all costs relieve it, but the cost of relieving it was often yet more poignant suffering to himself. Here is the letter:—

"SIR,—I know of no misery but a gaol to which my own imprudences and your letter seem to point. I have seen it inevitable these three or four weeks, and, by Heaven! request it as a favour, as a favour that may prevent somewhat more fatal. I have been some years struggling with a wretched being, with all that contempt which indigence brings with it, with all those strong passions which make contempt insupportable. What, then, has a gaol that is formidable? I shall at least have the society of wretches, and such is to me true society. I tell you again and again I am now neither able nor willing to pay you a farthing, but I will be punctual to any appointment you or the taylor shall make; thus far at least I do not act the sharper, since, unable to pay my debts one way, I would willingly give some security another. No, sir, had I been a sharper, had I been possessed of less good-nature and native generosity, I might now have been in better circumstances. I am guilty, I own, of meannesses which poverty unavoidably brings with it; my reflections are filled with repentance for my

imprudence, but not with remorse for being a villain. That may be a character you unjustly charge me with. Your books I can assure you are neither pawned nor sold, but in the custody of a friend from whom my necessities obliged me to borrow some money; whatever becomes of my person, you shall have them in a month. It is very possible both the reports you have heard and your own suggestions may have brought you false information with respect to my character; it is very possible that the man whom you now regard with detestation may inwardly burn with grateful resentment; it is very possible that upon a second perusal of the letter I sent you, you may see the workings of a mind strongly agitated with gratitude and jealousy. If such circumstances should appear, at least spare invective till my book with Mr Dodsley shall be published, and then perhaps you may see the bright side of a mind, when my professions shall not seem the dictates of necessity but of choice. You seem to think Dr Milner knew me not. Perhaps so; but he was a man I shall ever honour. But I have friendship only with the dead! I ask pardon for taking up so much time. Nor shall I add to it by any other professions than that I am, sir, your humble servant, OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

"P.S.—I shall expect impatiently the result of your resolutions."

The result was an offer of £20 for a life of Voltaire to be prefixed to a translation of *The Henriade*, from which was to be deducted the price of the clothes. Griffiths, like that contemporary bookseller, who said of a hack-writer, not yet quite worn out in his service, "There's flesh on his bones

yet," felt that Goldsmith would be more serviceable to him out of than in a gaol.

Literally there was little flesh on Goldsmith's bones in these days when he was often absolutely starving ; and there is no doubt at all that the privations of this Grub Street apprenticeship shortened his life. In a letter written to his brother Henry, about this time, he says :

"Though I never had a day's sickness since I saw you, yet I am not that strong and active man you once knew me. You scarcely can conceive how much eight years of disappointment, anguish and study have worn me down. If I remember right, you are seven or eight years older than me, yet I dare venture to say that, if a stranger saw us both, he would pay me the honours of seniority. Imagine to yourself a pale, melancholy visage, with two great wrinkles between the eyebrows, with an eye disgustingly severe and a big wig ; and you may have a perfect picture of my present appearance. On the other hand, I conceive you as perfectly sleek and healthy, passing many a happy day among your own children or those who knew you as a child. Since I knew what it was to be a man, this is a pleasure I have not known. I have passed my days among a parcel of cool designing beings, and I have contracted all their suspicious manner in my behaviour. I should actually be as unfit for the society of my friends at home as I detest that which I am obliged to partake of here. I can now neither partake of the pleasure of revel nor contribute to raise its jollity. I can neither laugh nor drink, have contracted a hesitating, disagreeable manner of speaking, and a visage that looks ill-

nature itself. In short I have thought myself into a settled melancholy and an utter disgust of all that life brings with it."

Of this suspicion, moroseness and settled souring of the soul what trace is there in his writings? It was in such circumstances and in such brutalising company that Goldsmith wrote the humanest novel in all literature. I remember once saying to Sir Leslie Stephen, Thackeray's son-in-law, that *Vanity Fair* left rather a bitter taste in my mouth. "Ah," he said, "you little know what Thackeray went through when he wrote that novel." No doubt when Thackeray wrote that novel he was passing through deep and bitter waters; but they were sweet and they were shallow compared with the waters Goldsmith sank in when he wrote a novel that seems woven out of threads spun from the Sermon on the Mount. See how it shines out against these clouds of gloom and storm with the sweet benignant light of the rainbow! Or, to borrow an apter image from *The Deserted Village*, "Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn." Boswell speaks of Goldsmith's envy and Johnson himself speaks of Goldsmith's malice. Discussing during the poet's life the subject of his own biography, Johnson said: "Goldsmith, sir, would do it best, but the malice of the dog against me would come out." Goldsmith's envy and malice! And these were men who knew him personally and intimately in all his moods and in all his moments! No! the motto of Goldsmith's works might be the motto of that Venetian sun-dial which so charmed Hazlitt:—" *Horas non numero nisi serenas.*"

If the hardships and privations of these years leave

no trace of bitterness in his works, they left a deep trace on his constitution and shortened his life. They were in the balance and turned the balance on that day when in the very prime of life he succumbed to a mild attack of fever. At the same time, it would be unfair to forget that, as there are lean kine whom all the food in the world would not fatten, so there are improvident folk whom all the wealth in the world would not enrich. In that letter to his brother from which I have just quoted, Goldsmith says :—

“Teach, then, my dear sir, to your son thrift and economy. Let his poor wandering uncle’s example be placed before his eyes. I had learned from books to be disinterested and generous before I was taught from experience the necessity of being prudent. I had contracted the habits and notions of a philosopher, while I was exposing myself to the insidious approaches of cunning; and often by being, even with my narrow finances charitable in excess, I forgot the rules of justice, and placed myself in the very situation of the wretch who thanked me for my bounty.”

In truth, Goldsmith was afflicted with a congenital and incurable marasmus of poverty which no riches could arrest. When he could get credit he tried Falstaff’s remedy, to find, as Jack found, the disease incurable. “I can get no remedy against this consumption of the purse; borrowing only lingers and lingers it out; but the disease is incurable.” Hence it is unfair to charge to anyone but himself the difficulties of the days of his prosperity, since what

Johnson said of him in these days is incontestable :—
 “He had raised money and squandered it by every artifice of acquisition and folly of expense”; but the absolute privations of his Grub Street days were due to the sweating of such Egyptian slave-drivers as this Griffiths. If these privations were in themselves a disgrace, as Bishop Percy characteristically suggests in the following snobbish passage, the disgrace was not Goldsmith’s. By the way, it is amusing to note the magnanimity with which the bishop condones the guilt of Goldsmith’s squalid circumstances in these days in consideration of his subsequent prosperity :—

“A friend of his”—*i.e.*, the bishop himself—“paying him a visit at the beginning of March 1759, found him in lodgings there so poor and uncomfortable that he should not think it proper to mention the circumstance if he did not consider it as the highest proof of the splendour of Dr Goldsmith’s genius and talents that, by the bare exertion of their powers, under every disadvantage of person and fortune, he could gradually emerge from such obscurity to the enjoyment of all the comforts and even luxuries of life and admission into the best society of London. The doctor was writing his *Enquiry*, etc., in a wretched dirty room in which there was but one chair, and when he from civility offered it to his visitant, himself was obliged to sit in the window. While they were conversing, some one gently rapped at the door, and, being desired to come in, a poor ragged little girl of very decent behaviour entered, who, dropping a curtsy, said : ‘My mamma sends her compliments, and begs the favour of you to lend her a chamber-pot full of coals.’”

The child's coal-measure and the bishop's measure of "the splendour of Dr Goldsmith's genius" seem equally vulgar. If "the highest proof of genius" is the attainment to comfort, luxury and the best society, one need waste no pity on those impostors whom François Maynard commiserates:—

"Malherbe, en cet âge brutal
Pégase est un cheval qui porte
Les grands hommes à l'hôpital."

But the very work of Goldsmith's to which the bishop here refers, *The Enquiry*, lays the disgrace of this indigence at the right door:—

"The poet's poverty is a standing topic of contempt. His writing for bread is an unpardonable offence. Perhaps of all mankind an author in these times is used most hardly. We keep him poor and yet revile his poverty. Like angry parents who correct their children till they cry, and then correct them for crying, we reproach him for living by his wit, and yet allow him no other means to live. His taking refuge in garrets and cellars has of late been violently objected to him, and that by men who, I dare hope, are more apt to pity than insult his distress. Is poverty the writer's fault? No doubt he knows how to prefer a bottle of champagne to the nectar of the neighbouring ale-house, or a venison-pasty to a plate of potatoes. Want of delicacy is not in him, but in us, who deny him the opportunity of making an elegant choice."

Towards the close of this chapter he describes with a pen dipped in his heart's blood his own exquisite suffering and sensitiveness to suffering, and foresees the early grave to which they will bring him:—

“If the author be, therefore, still so necessary among us, let us treat him with proper consideration as a child of the public, not a rent-charge on the community. And indeed a *child* of the public he is in all respects; for, while so well able to direct others, how incapable is he frequently found of guiding himself! His simplicity exposes him to all the insidious approaches of cunning; his sensibility to the slightest invasions of contempt. Though possessed of fortitude to stand unmoved the expected bursts of an earthquake, yet of feeling so exquisitely poignant as to agonise under the slightest disappointment. Broken rest, tasteless meals, and causeless anxiety shorten his life or make it unfit for active employment; prolonged vigils and intense application still farther contract his span, and make his time glide insensibly away. Let us not, then, aggravate these natural inconveniences by neglect; we have had sufficient instances of this kind already. Sale and Moore will suffice for one age at least. But they are dead and their sorrows are over. The neglected author of the *Persian Eclogues*, which, however inaccurate, excel any in our language, is still alive. Happy if *insensible* of our neglect, not *raging* at our ingratitude.¹ It is enough that the age has already produced instances of men pressing foremost in the lists of fame, and worthy of better times; schooled by continued adversity into hatred of their kind, flying from thought to drunkenness, yielding to the united pressure of labour, penury and sorrow, sinking unheeded, without one friend to drop a tear on their unattended obsequies and indebted to charity for a grave.”

¹ The allusion is to Collins, then insane.

What is not true of Oliver Goldsmith in this description only deepens our pity for what is but too true. Was ever man so little "schooled by continued adversity into hatred of his kind"? What heart that suffered so and felt suffering so, ever remained so un-embittered? Nothing that the craft and cruelty of man could do made him crafty or cruel, or less of a child in his simplicity, gentleness and kindness than he was in his childhood. More singular even than his natural sunny sweetness of nature is its incorruptibility. It could no more be soiled than it could be soured through an environment that was as polluting as it was embittering. It passes through these clouds and pollutions of all kinds, pure, bright and warm as it had entered them, "*Ut lux; etsi per imundos transeat, non inquinatur*"—to borrow a noble image from St Augustine.

CHAPTER IX

OUT OF EGYPT

WITH the appearance of *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe*, Goldsmith at the age of thirty-one emerged at last from Grub Street. But the book in winning him a name won him also many enemies, whose malice has affected his name to this day. Trace back the prejudice which nicknamed Goldsmith "Poor Poll" and "Inspired Idiot" to its source, and you will find it in passages reflecting on Garrick's profession and on Walpole's father in the *Enquiry*. Horace Walpole never forgave Goldsmith the following reflection in that work upon his father:—"But this link between patronage and learning now seems entirely broken. Since the days of a certain Prime Minister of inglorious memory, the learned have been kept pretty much at a distance. A jockey or a laced player supplies the place of a scholar, poet, or man of letters."

Garrick with more reason and with more bitterness resented the chapter "Of the Stage," as being levelled point-blank at himself. It is not likely that so vain a man as Garrick would forget or forgive such a passage as this:—"I have no particular spleen against the fellow who sweeps the stage with the besom, or the hero who brushes it with his train. It were a matter of indifference to me whether our heroines are chaste or our candle-snuffers burn their fingers, did not such make a great part of public care and polite conversation.

Our actors assume all that state off the stage which they do on it; and to use an expression borrowed from the green-room, everyone is *up* in his part. I am sorry to say it, they seem to forget their real characters."

We are not left merely to conjecture Garrick's resentment of this chapter in the *Enquiry* as a purely personal attack upon himself. When Goldsmith applied to him as a member of the Society of Arts to support by his vote and influence the poet's application for the Secretaryship, Garrick taxed him with the attack made personally upon himself in the *Enquiry*. Goldsmith manfully replied that he wrote what he believed to be the truth in the public interest without any intention of a personal application; and, as he declined to apologise, he lost whatever chance he had of the appointment. Vanity, implying as it does some lack of self-respect, is never magnanimous, and Garrick was so vain as to be even spiteful; and though, in deference to his sensitiveness, all the objectionable passages were omitted in subsequent editions of the *Enquiry*, Garrick still remembered them against their author when the opportunity of revenge presented itself. The nickname "Poor Poll" was one of his many reprisals.

But the *Enquiry* itself was a rash challenge to a host of a sensitive author's worst enemies, the critics. Bentley says finely: "It is a maxim with me that no man was ever written out of reputation but by himself," which of course is true of permanent reputation; but critics can always retard if they cannot arrest a writer's recognition. Now Goldsmith at the outset of his harassed career threw down the gauntlet to the critics in the *Enquiry*, whose very mottoes, Greek and

Latin, suggested that critics were to authors as sophists to philosophers, and as wreckers to ship-builders. This was a rash and even reckless stand to take in days when critics were all that Swift represented them in his *Tale of a Tub*, and by a man who, unlike Swift, was exquisitely sensitive to the brazen bray of these Scythian asses, to the venomous vomit of these Indian serpents. And Goldsmith, not satisfied with his general contention "that criticism is the destroyer of polite learning, and that an increase of criticism has always portended its decay"; comes down to particulars and has the courage even to adduce in illustration the two leading Reviews, Griffiths' and Smollett's—*The Monthly* and *The Critical*.

"We have two leading Reviews in London, with critical newspapers and magazines without number. The compilers of these resemble the commoners of Rome—they are all for levelling property not by increasing their own, but by diminishing that of others. The man who has any good-nature in his disposition must, however, be somewhat displeased to see distinguished reputations often the sport of ignorance, to see by one false pleasantry the future peace of a worthy man's life disturbed, and this only because he has unsuccessfully attempted to instruct or amuse us. Though ill-nature is far from being wit, yet it is generally laughed at as such. The critic enjoys the triumph and ascribes to his parts what is only due to his effrontery. I fire with indignation when I see persons wholly destitute of education and genius indent to the press and thus turn book-makers, adding to the sin of criticism the sin of ignorance also; whose trade is a bad one and who are bad workmen in the trade. . . . Were these Monthly

Reviews and Magazines frothy, pert or absurd, they might find some pardon; but to be dull and dronish is an encroachment on the prerogative of a folio."

To this attack Smollett in the *Critical* only and mildly objected because it classed his Review with Griffiths'—"Confounding a work undertaken from public spirit with one supported for the sordid purposes of a bookseller." But Griffiths in the *Monthly* let loose upon his former hack that noisome ferret, Kenrick:—

"Notwithstanding our author talks so familiarly of *us*—the great—and affects to be thought in the rank of Patrons, we cannot help thinking that in more places than one he has betrayed in himself the man he so severely condemns for drawing a quill to take a purse. We are even so firmly convinced of this that we dare put the question home to his conscience, whether he never experienced the unhappy situation he so feelingly describes in that of a literary Understrapper? His remarking him as coming down from his garret to rummage the bookseller's shop for materials to work upon, and the knowledge he displays of his minutest labours give great reason to suspect he may himself have had concerns in the *bad trade* of book-making. '*Fronti nulla fides.*' We have heard of many a writer who, patronised only by his bookseller, has nevertheless affected the Gentleman in print, and talked full as cavalierly as our author himself. We have even known one hardy enough publicly to stigmatise men of the first rank in literature for their immoralities, while conscious himself of labouring under the infamy of having by the vilest and meanest actions forfeited all pretensions to honour and honesty. If such men as these, boasting

a liberal education and pretending to genius, practise at the same time those arts which bring the Sharper to the cart's-tail or the pillory, need our author wonder that 'Learning partakes the contempt of its professors'?"

Kenrick emphasises this venomous reference to the clothes-pawning transaction by one of those disavowals of a personal application designed to insure its being personally applied. Griffiths' disavowal of the virulent attack was less artistic. Having not only hired his bravo but also charged the pistol with this special bullet, he considered it an adequate defence to plead that he had not himself fired the shot. It needed a stronger man than Goldsmith is popularly supposed to have been—depending as he did for his bitter bread upon such employers—to expose thus both them and their hacks—to kick over the stone which hid such crawling creatures and let the light in on them and on the dung which bred them.

But Goldsmith had the higher courage to attack higher game in the *Enquiry*; for he was the first to denounce the Gargantuan Johnsonese then in universal vogue:—

"It were to be wished, therefore, that we no longer found pleasure with the inflated style that has for some years been looked upon as fine writing, and which every young writer is now obliged to adopt if he chooses to be read. We should now dispense with loaded epithet and dressing up trifles with dignity. For, to use an obvious instance, it is not those who make the greatest noise with their wares in the streets that have most to sell. Let us, instead of writing finely, try to write naturally; not hunt after lofty expressions to deliver mean ideas, nor

be for ever gaping when we only mean to deliver a whisper."

Yet Boswell suggests that Goldsmith formed his style on that of *The Rambler*!

But, to say the truth, the sublimest instance of Goldsmith's courage was the *Enquiry* itself. He was about as competently equipped for traversing all the ground *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* purported to cover, as he had been for traversing Europe itself with no other resources than his flute, his voice and his skill in disputation. At whom if not at himself was he smiling when he describes the hack-critic "coming down at stated intervals to rummage the bookseller's counter for materials to work upon." In truth, like the fairy in the child's tale, who wove a lovely robe out of picked up odds and ends of silk thread, he made a singularly fine book out of casual, scanty and fragmentary materials. If its learning was not profound, its wisdom was; and yet, though wise enough to be entitled to the folio's prerogative of dullness, it exhibited to perfection an art distinctively Goldsmith's of—

"Wearing his wisdom lightly; like the fruit
Which in our winter woodland, looks a flower."

As, however, popularly wisdom is as much associated with ponderousness as judicial sagacity with a judge's voluminous wig, Goldsmith's airy lightness of style suggests to "the general" superficiality. By an odd paradox the natural always commends itself least to the uncultured and most to the cultured. "*He the best player!*" cried Partridge in *Tom Jones* of Garrick in *Hamlet*. "*He the best player!* Why I

could act as well myself. I am sure if I had seen a ghost, I should have looked in the very same manner, and done just as he did. The King for my money! He speaks all his words distinctly and half as loud again as the other." Johnsonese and all the other styles which speak "half as loud again" as nature charm "naturals," using that word in its original sense of uncultivable intellects. Indeed, Johnson himself in one of his *Ramblers* explains at once his adoption of this style and the reason of its popularity with "the general." "It has been observed," he says in this *Rambler*, "by Boileau that 'a mean or common thought, expressed in pompous diction, generally pleases more than a new or noble sentiment delivered in low or vulgar language; because the number is greater of those whom custom has enabled to judge of words, than of those whom study has qualified to examine things.'" And Johnson proceeds to illustrate from Shakespeare the vulgarisation of "a new or noble sentiment through its being delivered in low language," taking as his text "a speech of Macbeth's," which, by the way, Macbeth never uttered!

This probably helps to explain the failure of Goldsmith's next venture, *The Bee*. *The Bee* was a Saturday threepenny journal started by a Mr Wilkie shortly after the appearance of the *Enquiry* had given Goldsmith literary standing. It had but a short life, probably, as I say, because it was written in the reverse of that "inflated style that has for some years been looked upon as fine writing, and which every young writer is now obliged to adopt, if he chooses to be read." Johnson's style was by this thoroughly established in the public favour, for use has much to do with taste. The eye which has

long been used to the crinoline gets to think, not it, but the lack of it, a deformity; and the crinoline style of Johnson had similarly distorted the taste of that generation. Indeed, Goldsmith in the introduction to *The Bee* prepares himself and his readers for the failure of the periodical in his parable (to which I have already alluded) of the man who in a country where every inhabitant had each a large excrescence depending from the chin, was universally laughed at for the lack of this adornment. "Good folks," said he at last, "I perceive that I am the unfortunate cause of all this good-humour. It is true I may have faults in abundance; but I shall never be induced to reckon my want of a swelled face among the number."

If, however, Goldsmith could not away with Johnsonese; for Johnson himself, and even for *The Rambler* he had a due and deep admiration. In another number of *The Bee* he pays "the Great Cham" a compliment, which probably helped Goldsmith to the fastest of all his London friendships, excepting that with Sir Joshua Reynolds. In his description in this number of *The Bee* of the passengers in his Coach of Fame, Johnson figures thus:—

"This was a very grave personage, whom at some distance I took for one of the most reserved and even disagreeable figures I had ever seen. But, as he approached, his appearance improved, and, when I could distinguish him thoroughly, I perceived that, in spite of the severity of his brow, he had one of the most good-natured countenances that could be imagined. Upon coming to open the stage door, he lifted a parcel of folios into the seat before him,

but our inquisitorial Coachman at once shoved them out again. 'What! Not take in my Dictionary?' exclaimed the other in a rage. 'Be patient, sir,' replied the Coachman, 'I have drove a coach, man and boy, these two thousand years; but I do not remember to have carried above one dictionary during the whole time. That little book which I perceive peeping from one of your pockets, may I presume to ask what it contains?' 'A mere trifle,' replied the author, 'it is called *The Rambler*.' '*The Rambler*!' says the Coachman. 'I beg, Sir, you'll take your place; I have heard our ladies in the Court of Apollo frequently mention it with rapture; and Clio, who happens to be a little grave, has been heard to prefer it to *The Spectator*; though others have observed that the reflections by being refined, sometimes become minute.'"

This compliment probably helped to secure Goldsmith the favourable introduction to Johnson that began their intimacy—an intimacy of which we have chiefly, I might almost say solely, Boswell's record. As the main object of my little book is to counteract the prejudiced impression of Goldsmith left on the mind of the readers of Boswell's *Johnson*, I hope I may be pardoned if I reiterate, even perhaps *ad nauseam*, my contention that this impression was prejudiced. Boswell's jealousy of Goldsmith was such that he not only noted eagerly everything Johnson said to the poet's disadvantage; but again and again provoked his idol into hasty disparagement of his rival in that idol's good graces. Boswell's fascinating biography is, perhaps, as honest a book as ever was written; but the very indisputableness of its honesty is unfortunate for Goldsmith. Boswell

himself cuts such a figure again and again in the book that you are inclined to say of him what M. Royard-Collard said—of course of a friend—"He is not an ass, he is **THE** ass!" Thus you get an *a fortiori* conviction of the candour of the rest of his portraiture. But, in the first place, Boswell was what the Arabs call "a compound imbecile"—*i.e.*, a man who is too foolish to know himself a fool. He wrote himself down an ass in the complacent confidence that he was giving you the opposite impression. In the second place, the most candid and careful observer sees only what he is on the look-out for, and Boswell was ever on the look-out for what he considered the absurdities of his rival, Goldsmith. In the third place, what he considered Goldsmith's absurdities were often passing jests taken seriously—drops which in the sun look a rainbow, but fallen on earth only ditch-water.

This, of course, would not matter so much if Boswell gave you only his own impression of Goldsmith, but he succeeds also in suggesting to you that this contemptuous impression was shared by Johnson. No one can read Boswell without getting it gradually ground into his mind that Goldsmith was a very small man, not in Boswell's opinion only, or only in the opinion of Garrick or of Horace Walpole or of the members of the Club, but also in the judgment of Johnson himself. But, if you want Johnson's real judgment of Goldsmith, you must not infer it from his hasty outbursts against the poet, often designedly provoked by Boswell, but from more deliberate verdicts. I shall say nothing of the famous Westminster Abbey epitaph composed by Johnson, since epitaphs are the single exception to the rule

"*Les absents ont toujours tort*," only perhaps because they are a reaction from it—an attempt to make up for injustice done a friend in life by doing him more than justice after death. As, in Goldsmith's case, there was a large indemnity of this kind due from "The Club," the epitaph might well be suspected of extravagance. But Johnson in a letter to Bennet Langton, after an incidental and unemotional reference to Goldsmith's recent death and a severe censure of his extravagance, adds: "Let not his frailties be remembered: He was a very great man."

CHAPTER X

"THE CHINESE LETTERS"

EVEN already Goldsmith's

"Name was growing great
In mouths of wisest censure."

Immediately upon the death of *The Bee*, after a two months' hopeless struggle with catchpenny rivals, Goldsmith was waited upon by both Smollett, the novelist, and Newbery, the bookseller, to ask the help of his pen for their respective literary ventures. Goldsmith agreed to support both ventures—Smollett's *British Magazine*, or *Monthly Repository for Gentlemen and Ladies* (a title suggestive of an old-clothes shop or a Pantechnicon) and Newbery's daily newspaper, *The Public Ledger*.

Some of the essays he contributed to *The Monthly Repository for Gentlemen and Ladies* are delightfully humorous; yet it was not until they had been pirated and reprinted sixteen times and claimed by other writers, that Goldsmith at last republished them under his own name. He ventures to justify their issue for his own advantage by the parallel case "of that fat man whom I have somewhere read of in a shipwreck, who, when the sailors, pressed by famine, were taking slices off him to satisfy their hunger, insisted, with great justice, on having the first cut for himself."

He held these essays cheap because they cost him little. Most of them were thrown off hurriedly under the hustling pressure of the printer's devil. Putting aside altogether—and it is a good deal to put aside—Goldsmith's inveterate procrastination, which brought him last to every party and kept him late with every publisher—leaving this out of calculation, and taking only into account the immense and even amazing amount of pot-boiling work he did in these years, you are left in no doubt that much of it must have been extemporised. Goldsmith detested the drudgery of the pen and was ingenious in devising excuses for evading it as long as possible. Hence publishers had at times to treat him as you must always treat (whenever you have the luck to meet with it) the Irish fairy called a Leprechaun. As long as you hold him fast and under your eye, he will spin gold for you; but, if you are seduced for a moment to take your hand and eye off him—and his ingenuity in inventing pretexts to divert you is diabolical—then you lose your chance of gold.

If there was any truth in the “muddy river” theory of Goldsmith's mind, essays written in such peremptory and perfunctory haste would be obscure and confused. Are they? They are clear with the lucidity of a pen lightly held and lightly running. “Is there a man now, sir,” cried Johnson, in answer to a stupid sneer of Ellis', “is there a man now, sir, who can pen an essay with such ease and elegance as Goldsmith?” With the swiftness, ease and brightness, it will be said of a shallow stream—

“For shallow streams run dimpling all the way.”

Is that so? Take *The Chinese Letters*, as they

were then called, pot-boiling essays contributed twice a week to Newbery's *Public Ledger*, representing but a small part of Goldsmith's work, and that a part which was usually postponed to the last moment. Might not their motto be the Horatian, "*Scribendi recte sapere est et principium et fons?*" They are profoundly and even prophetically wise essays. In them he foresaw the French Revolution: he foresaw the successful secession of the American Colonies: he foresaw the portentous rise of Russia, and all that Russia would mean to the West and to the world. At home he foresaw what some of our profound politicians assure us is going on to-day under our eyes in England—the declension of our colonial and continental trade unaccompanied and uncompensated by any declension in our extravagance. Perhaps the letter on this subject is worth quoting for its opportuneness, and therefore for its effectiveness as a popular illustration of the wisdom of these casual essays. In the letter, "Lao," is England, and "Tartary" her colonies:—

"Between these colonies and the mother-country a very advantageous traffic was at first carried on. The republic sent their colonies large quantities of the manufactures of the country, and they, in turn, provided the republic with an equivalent in ivory and ginseng. By this means the inhabitants became immensely rich, and this produced an equal degree of voluptuousness; for men who have much money will ever find some fantastical means of enjoyment. How shall I mark the steps by which they declined? Every colony in process of time spreads over the whole country where it was first planted. As it grows more populous, it becomes

more polite ; and those manufactures, for which it was in the beginning obliged to others, it learns to dress up for itself. Such was the case with the colonies of Lao. They, in less than a century, became a powerful and polite people ; and the more polite they grew, the less advantageous was the commerce which still subsisted between them and others. By this means the mother-country, being abridged in its commerce, grew poorer, but not less luxurious. Their former wealth had introduced luxury ; and wherever luxury once fixes, no art can either lessen or remove it. Their commerce with their neighbours was totally destroyed, and that with their colonies was every day naturally and necessarily declining. They still, however, preserved the insolence of wealth, without a power to support it, and persevered in being luxurious, while contemptible from poverty. In short, the State resembled one of those bodies bloated with disease, whose bulk is only a symptom of wretchedness. Their former opulence only rendered them more impotent, as those individuals who are reduced from riches to poverty are, of all men, the most unfortunate and helpless. They had imagined because their colonies tended to make them rich upon the first acquisition, they would still continue to do so. They now found, however, that on themselves alone they should have depended for support ; that colonies ever afforded but temporary affluence, and when cultivated and polite are no longer useful. From such a concurrence of circumstances they soon became contemptible. The Emperor, Honti, invaded them with a powerful army. Historians do not say whether their colonies were too remote to lend assistance, or else were desirous

of shaking off their dependence, but certain it is, they scarcely made any resistance; their walls were now found a weak defence, and they at length were obliged to acknowledge subjection to the Empire of China. Happy, very happy, might they have been had they known when to bound their riches and their glory; had they known that extending empire is often diminishing power; that countries are ever strongest which are internally powerful; that colonies, by draining away the brave and enterprising, leave the country in the hands of the timid and avaricious; that walls give little protection, unless manned with resolution; that too much commerce may injure a nation as well as too little, and that there is a wide difference between a conquering and a flourishing empire."

Again, there was hardly an abuse in Church, State or Society, however sacred in those days, that Goldsmith did not deride or denounce in his essays; while he alone cried aloud against the vindictive ferocity of the laws. It was a day in which that worthy magistrate, Sir John Hawkins, lamented that there were absolutely still fourteen cases where it was possible to cheat the gallows, and in which it needed all a magistrate's expert knowledge and all the worthy knight's minute and malevolent ingenuity to discover fourteen such cases. The following case, which occurred a whole generation nearer our own humane time than Goldsmith's day, was certainly not one of them. A young woman with a baby at her breast, whose husband and sole support had been torn from her by a press-gang, reduced thus at last to absolute starvation, went into a shop in Ludgate Hill, took up a piece of calico from the counter, was

seen, and seeing that she was seen, put it down again. For this offence she was tried, found guilty, was sentenced and was hanged! Such was the law in Goldsmith's day, and for an entire generation after his day. He alone cried out against it, not on the mere ground of humanity, which would most of all appeal to him, but on the high statesmanlike ground that life was incommensurably more valuable than property, if only because it was irreplaceable. “If, therefore, in order to secure the effects of one man, I should make a law which takes away the life of another, in such a case to attain a smaller good I am guilty of a greater evil; to secure another in the possession of a bauble, I render a real and valuable possession precarious.”

Another reform to which we ourselves are only just awaking Goldsmith pleads for through a telling parable :—

“It was a fine saying of the Nangfu, the emperor, who, being told that his enemies had raised an insurrection in one of the distant provinces, ‘Come, then, my friends,’ said he, ‘follow me and I promise you that we shall quickly destroy them.’ He marched forward and the rebels submitted upon his approach. All now thought that he would take the most signal revenge, but were surprised to see the captives treated with mildness and humanity. ‘How,’ cried his first minister, ‘is this the manner in which you fulfil your promise? Your royal word was given that your enemies should be destroyed, and, behold! you have pardoned all and even caressed some!’ ‘I promised,’ replied the emperor with a generous air, ‘to destroy my enemies. I have fulfilled my word, for see, they are enemies no longer. I have made friends of them.’

"This, could it always succeed, were the true method of destroying the enemies of the state. Well it were if rewards and mercy alone could regulate the commonwealth ; but since punishments are sometimes necessary, let them at least be rendered terrible by being executed but seldom ; and let Justice lift her sword rather to terrify than revenge."

In these *Chinese Letters*, which were Goldsmith's chief contributions to the *Public Ledger*, making the success of that journal, there is, I venture to say, profounder criticism, not of the mere fashions, foibles and follies of English society only, but of Church, of State, of the character of the people, of the laws of the country and of the policy of the empire, than can be found in the essays of Steele, Addison or Johnson. These *Chinese Letters* alone ought to dispose of the popular notion that Goldsmith's single faculty was the skill of a shop-window dresser, whose natural taste and deft manipulation make a specious display of a stock at once scanty and ill-assorted. They should also, I think, dispose of the notion that Goldsmith's thoughts were born aborted and needed as much nursing as an infant kangaroo to be made presentable. Since they were written, and had to be written, as cursory current literature, Goldsmith had not the time either to mature his thoughts or to order them—to clear either them or their expression. If he did not need the time in writing so hurriedly for the press, neither did he need it in ordering or expressing his thoughts in congenial company. Only in disconcerting company could he have seemed an addle-pated "Poor Poll." I remember with what unconscious humour a formal and freezing Yorkshireman complained once to me of the dulness of an Irish

clergyman, who had the just reputation of being the most genial and jovial of men: "I sat with him for two hours," said my dreary Yorkshire friend, "and *he didn't seem cheerful the whole time!*" It never did, for it never could, occur to him, that he himself would freeze the genial current of any soul. "I can only say he never shone when I was present," as the extinguisher said of the candle. The poor player in one of the *Chinese Letters* who had had a triumphal progress from county town to county town was at last frozen into failure by "the lady who had been nine months in London." All the county folk looked at her, instead of at him, while she sat in her box, chill and chilling as an iceberg; and the discouragement so discomposed the poor player that he became at last the failure her face from the first pronounced him.

In the fourth of these *Letters* Goldsmith writes: "The gayest conversation of the English have something too wise for innocent relaxation; though in company you are seldom disgusted with the absurdity of a fool, you are seldom lifted into rapture by those strokes of vivacity which give instant though not permanent pleasure." And in an essay on Clubs he describes the discomfiture of a frivolous attempt of his own to break through such solid ice.

CHAPTER XI

TOIL AND TEARS

THE improvement in his circumstances and in his prospects justified Goldsmith in flitting from his garret in Green Arbour Court into the more comfortable rooms in the more respectable neighbourhood of Wine Office Court, Fleet Street. Here he lived for the next two years—years of astonishing fertility of invention and facility of work. The amount, excellence and variety of work done in these years are all the more amazing when his habit of procrastination and his frequent illnesses are considered ; while he had, besides, to weigh upon him the dispiriting sense that he was paying for eaten bread. He discounted the future, lived on advances and in almost all his present work was doing the most depressing of duties to the improvident—paying a debt. Oddly enough the men who contract debts with the greatest pleasure are always the men who pay them with the greatest pain—wherein a French wit compares all debts to that greatest of all debts—children. But the most unpleasant of the debts of improvidence is that payable through the brain ; since, while merely mechanical work serves as a distraction to care and worry, care and worry distract brain-work.

Hence the conditions under which Goldsmith worked in these years, and indeed during his entire

literary life, were the reverse of favourable to excellence, yet how excellent is even his most casual and perfunctory work! Even the prefaces and introductions which he supplied to order to works he had not read, on subjects he had not studied, are admirably to the purpose. Whether such prefaces and introductions to unread books of every kind and of every degree of merit are morally defensible, I must leave to the judgment of that robust moralist, Dr Johnson, who was himself a kind of Universal Provider of such wares. "Did you know, sir, much of Rolt, or of trade or commerce, when you wrote your admirable preface to Rolt's *Dictionary of Trade and Commerce*?" asked the ingenuous Boswell. "Sir," replied the sage, "I never saw the man and never read the book. The booksellers wanted a preface to a *Dictionary of Trade and Commerce*, and I wrote a preface accordingly." Yet this Rolt was a gross literary impostor! But in those days a preface seemed about of the value of a doctor's certificate to-day; or perhaps the closest modern analogy to it is the introduction which an impecunious peeress offers in advertisements for cash down to any social aspirant, however humble or homely. This analogy might also be made to apply to Goldsmith's *History of England in a Series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son*, where the fathering of the work upon a nobleman unquestionably conduced to its success in days when a wit among lords was considered a lord among wits. At the same time it is only fair to say that the special lords to whom the *Letters* were popularly attributed—Orrery, Chesterfield or Lyttleton—were of sufficient literary eminence to suggest that the intrinsic merit of the work was appreciated.

To this period also belongs Goldsmith's *Life of Beau Nash*, a life excellent in itself, but interesting also in that it is not a biography only, but in a sense an autobiography. It really resembles those confessions in old-fashioned novels made by some penitent under the thin disguise of telling another's story. Under the guise of a defence of the follies, foibles and "failings that lean to virtue's side" of Beau Nash, it is in some degree Goldsmith's *apologia pro vita mea*.

While writing a *Life of Beau Nash* he was writing also a *Life of Christ*, *Lives of the Fathers*, epitomising *Plutarch's Lives*, and, at the same time, revising a *History of Mecklenburgh*, compiling an anthology, and a work on Natural History, and contributing to a *General History of the Late War*. This versatility of Goldsmith's pen has done something to damage his literary reputation. Only in an epitaph is it allowed to anyone that "*Nullum fere scribendi genus non tetigit; nullum quod tetigit non ornavit.*" The gate of fame is as strait as that of heaven—and more crowded; while the crush and crowds increase incalculably from generation to generation. Hence a competitor, to squeeze through, must be as lightly equipped as possible, and is fortunate to carry with him a single work of any kind, or even a single specimen of that work. Even when, not posthumous fame, but contemporary reputation, is in question, there is nothing more difficult than for a man who has made a name in one walk to get credit for success in another. For the popular mind is even more strait of access than heaven itself. No proverb is more deeply rooted in it than, "A Jack of all trades is master of none"; since, being itself, so to say, of one

dimension, it cannot conceive a mind of two or of three dimensions, no more than it can conceive a fourth dimension of space. Hence if a man happens to have many reputations, these reputations are so far from adding to each other that they detract from each other. A single feather in one's cap is more highly valued popularly than a whole plume of feathers. In *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* a milliner holds up a bonnet rich in flowers, feathers, lace and velvet, and says, "There! the price of that as it stands is two guineas." Then she plucks away half its glories and says, "Now its price is four guineas." Having still further denuded it, she still further enhances its price—like that of the Sybilline Books—"Now it is six guineas." And when she has finally plucked it almost bald as an egg, leaving it but a single feather and hardly more than a single straw, she cries triumphantly, "Now, its price is ten guineas!" Similarly a single feather in your cap is of more value in the popular estimation than a whole plume of feathers.

No doubt, then, Goldsmith would stand higher in popular esteem if he had written only *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*, but for these three works together he got about £170—hardly a maintenance for life, even in a Green Arbour Court garret. In order to write these works he had to live, and in order to live he had to extemporise on any and every subject that the booksellers thought would sell. When Lord Lisburn at the Academy dinner asked if he was writing a new poem, Goldsmith answered: "I cannot afford to court the draggle-tail Muses, my lord, they would let me starve; but by my other labours I can make shift to eat and drink and

have good clothes." Or, as he expressed it pathetically in *The Deserted Village* :—

"And thou sweet Poetry, thou loveliest maid,
Still first to fly where sensual joys invade ;
Unfit in these degenerate times of shame,
To catch the heart, or strike for honest fame ;
Dear charming nymph, neglected and decried,
My shame in crowds, my solitary pride ;
Thou source of all my bliss and all my woe,
Thou found'st me poor at first and keep'st me so ;
Thou guide by which the nobler arts excel,
Thou nurse of every virtue, fare thee well !"

Hence to keep himself alive Goldsmith had, as he said to Cradock pathetically, "to write a volume every month!" And this effort to keep alive threatened to defeat itself, since Goldsmith often broke down under the stress and strain of incessant work. When writing, *e.g.*, a volume a month of the abridgment of *Plutarch's Lives*, ordered and paid for in advance by Newbery, he broke down in the middle of Volume V., and writes thus to implore the publisher's consent to its being finished by another pen :—

"DEAR SIR,—As I have been out of order for some time past, and am still not quite recovered, the fifth volume of *Plutarch's Lives* remains unfinished. I fear I shall not be able to do it, unless there be an actual necessity and that none else can be found. If, therefore, you would send it to Mr Collier I should esteem it a kindness, and will pay for whatever it may come to.

"*N.B.*—I received twelve guineas for the two volumes.—I am, sir, your obliged humble servant,
"OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

"Pray let me have an answer."

As Newbery in answer insisted upon Goldsmith's doing himself what he had contracted to do, and had been paid in advance six guineas a volume for doing so, the poet rejoined with an irritability due to illness and worry :—

“SIR,—One volume *is* done, namely, the fourth. When I said I should be glad Mr Collier would do the fifth for me, I only demanded it as a favour, but, if he cannot conveniently do it, tho' I have kept my chamber these three weeks and am not yet quite recovered, yet I will do it. I send it per bearer, and, if the affair puts you to the least inconvenience, return it, and it shall be done immediately.—I am, etc. O. G.

“The printer has the copy for the rest.”

These are specimens of the kind of letters which Goldsmith through illness, or procrastination or improvidence, was for ever writing to his publishers, and they suggest the trouble which embittered and shortened his life. He was always heavily discounting to-morrow, paying for an hour in the present by a year in the future, “borrowing joy at usury of pain.”

One thing more—and more to his credit—kept Goldsmith dragging after him an ever-lengthening chain of debt—his softness of head and heart in the matter of being imposed upon by a host of hangers-on. What Thackeray says of every successful Irishman in London that he has always a host of ragged retainers hanging on to him, was certainly true of Goldsmith. Here is a characteristic and amusing story, to suggest that much of Goldsmith's improvidence was due to his playing Providence

to poorer fellow-countrymen. One of these Irish hangers-on, Jack Pilkington, son of Swift's notorious *protégé*, Lætitia, called one day on Goldsmith in Green Arbour Court, not apparently after his usual fashion, to beg, but to brag. He was in such wild spirits that he could not sit down and could hardly speak. His fortune was at last made! It seems that a certain duchess had a mania for white mice, of which she had been able up to this to procure but two—in spite of her offer of any sum and of a search throughout the world. Here Jack saw his certainty of a competence for life; for he had long ago commissioned a friend bound for India to procure him there, if possible, two white mice, and they had come! They were actually in the river!—in an East Indiaman now in the docks! All that was needed now was such a cage for the priceless treasures as could be presented to a duchess, and a cage sufficiently handsome could be procured for the paltry sum of two guineas. But even this wretched sum Jack at that moment had not at command, and he came therefore to borrow it for a few hours from his true and generous friend, Goldsmith. Even Goldsmith, says Cooke, to whom the poet afterwards told the story, was staggered by this preposterous tale and rallied his friend upon its absurdity. But Jack, prepared for this, immediately produced a letter from his Indian friend, advising him of the shipping of the white mice, and describing their size and beauty. Goldsmith at last convinced, asked: "How much did you say a suitable cage would cost?" "About two guineas," replied Jack eagerly. "Phew! Two guineas! My dear Jack, you are out of luck, for I have but half a guinea in

the world!" "But, dear doctor, there's your watch! If you would let me have your watch I could pawn it over the way for a couple of guineas. I am ashamed to ask such a thing, and I shouldn't dare to ask it from any other friend in the world than you, or for any other occasion than this, when I am absolutely sure to be able to release it and return it in two days." Goldsmith, in spite of his having been taken in by Jack a hundred times before, gave him the watch. He never saw or heard again of Jack nor of his white mice, till the poor starving wretch was on his death-bed, when Goldsmith sent him a guinea.

To take the rather rank taste of Jack Pilkington out of the reader's mouth, I should like to be allowed for more than one reason to tell, or rather to allow Goldsmith's beneficiary to tell, a tale to their mutual credit.

"I was then about eighteen," said Dr M'Veagh M'Donnell, recalling years after his first fortunate meeting with Goldsmith. "I was then about eighteen, and possessed neither friends nor money, not even the means of getting to Ireland, of which or of England I knew scarcely anything from having so long resided in France. In this situation I had strolled about for two or three days, considering what to do, but unable to come to any determination, when Providence directed me to the Temple Gardens. I threw myself on a seat, and, willing to forget my miseries for a moment, drew out a book—a volume of Boileau. I had not been there long when a gentleman strolling about passed near me and, observing perhaps something Irish or foreign in my garb or countenance, addressed me: 'Sir, you seem

studious; I hope you find this a favourable place to pursue it.' A good deal of conversation then ensued. I told him part of my history, and he, in turn, gave his address in the Temple, desiring me to call soon; and from the address to my infinite surprise and satisfaction I found that the person who thus seemed to take an interest in my fate, was my countryman and a distinguished ornament of letters. I did not fail to keep the appointment and was then received in the kindest manner. He told me smilingly that he was not rich; that he could do little for me in direct pecuniary aid, but would endeavour to put me in the way of doing something for myself; observing that he could at least furnish me with advice not wholly useless to a young man placed in the heart of the great metropolis. 'In London,' he continued, 'nothing is to be got for nothing. You must work, and no man who chooses to be industrious need be under obligations to another, for here labour of every kind commands its reward. If you think proper to assist me occasionally as amanuensis, I shall be obliged, and you will be placed under no obligation, until something more permanent can be secured for you.' This employment, which I pursued for some time, was to translate passages from *Buffon*, which was abridged or altered, according to circumstances, for his *Natural History*."

Dr M'Donnell added that it pained him deeply to see his kind patron so often plunged into fits of depression, hunted down continually by printers and booksellers, to whom he had sold his future; and that, when he heard afterwards of the poet's death, he "cried bitterly and a blank came over his heart."

This reminiscence of Dr M'Veagh M'Donnell is worth quoting for the picture it gives of Goldsmith, ever on the lookout to do a kindness, working on manfully—"here labour of every kind commands its reward"—but working desperately, plunged in profound depths of despondency at the hopelessness of the struggle. He had mortgaged his life to the booksellers and foreclosure was imminent.

And here it should, I think, be noted to Goldsmith's credit and to the quickening of our sympathy with his ever-increasing and ever-deepening moods and moments of despair, that these moods and moments disqualify him from ranking with Elia's "Great Race"—the race of the born borrowers. "Observe," says Elia in this delightful essay, "observe who have been the greatest borrowers of all ages—Alcibiades, Falstaff, Sir Richard Steele, our late incomparable Brinsley—what a family likeness in all four! What a careless, even deportment hath your borrower! what rosy gills! what a beautiful reliance on Providence doth he manifest, taking no more thought than the lilies! What contempt for money; accounting it (yours and mine especially) no better than dross!" Dick Steele, "our own incomparable Brinsley," and many other of Goldsmith's countrymen certainly belonged to the Great Race in right of their sublime indifference to their obligations. When Dumas, the Prince of the Great Race, was about to sign his name on the stamp of a bill for three months, he said airily, with pen poised above the paper, "That stamp is now worth one franc; and now," as he signed his name across it, "nothing!" There is the Great Race at its greatest!

But Goldsmith was so far from belonging to the

Great Race that his debts made him moody and miserable, unsociable even in congenial society and yet more unhappy alone. He had himself only to blame for it, you say ; but no one knew that better than himself, and the reflection was not consolatory. "You forgive that man everything who forgives himself nothing," says the Buddhist text ; and you should forgive it all the more when, as in Goldsmith's case, he paid the uttermost farthing in endless and hopeless toil, in abject and bitter slavery to the booksellers, in remorseful misery and in an early grave.

CHAPTER XII

FRIENDSHIP WITH JOHNSON

SO far Goldsmith's published work was the merest pot-boiling hack work, which was never better described than by the Italian poet, Count Gaspare Gozzi, whom I quote, because not his life only, but his shiftless character was like the Irish poet's :—

"I had to pledge my brain and let it out for hire to the grasping booksellers, daily giving them their portion. Just as an old woman slowly spins flax, thread by thread, from the distaff, in order that Saturday may bring payment for all her late toil, so must I spin out my brain, fibre by fibre, down to its lowest cells, toiling in drudgery and misery at dull work that brings no glory, and is death to a man and his good name."

Now, however, Goldsmith was about to break covert, so to say, to have henceforth the dogs of envy and detraction in full cry after him, and to suffer what Byron calls "the martyrdom of fame." In the case of Goldsmith's fame, this martyrdom was not only life-long, but posthumous, owing to that very friendship with Johnson which helped him to an early recognition. "Goldsmith, sir," said Boswell to Johnson, "is much indebted to you for getting so high in the public estimation." "Why, sir," Johnson replied, "he has perhaps got *sooner* to it by his intimacy with me."

But this intimacy, which was no doubt a direct advantage to the fame of Goldsmith during his life, has indirectly since his death helped to prejudice it through the distorted portrait of him, drawn by the jealousy of Boswell in the most widely-read of all biographies.

This, however, was not the fault of Johnson, to whom Goldsmith owed only unwearied kindness. The first recorded notice of the commencement of their intimacy is too characteristic to be overlooked. Johnson, having accepted an invitation to sup with Goldsmith in his new lodgings, was discovered by Percy, who had called to escort the sage to their host's, in gorgeous apparel. As the doctor's usual attire, according to Miss Reynolds, was that of a beggar-man, Percy stood gaping, amazed at the transformation. "Why, sir," the doctor hastened to explain, "why, sir, I hear that Goldsmith, who is a very great sloven, justifies his disregard to cleanliness and decency by quoting my practice, and I am desirous this night to show him a better example." This single exemplary deviation into tidiness has been quoted ever since as reflecting immense credit upon the good sense of the sage, and no doubt it was as creditable as the teetotalism of the rector's daughter in *Punch*:—"Edith!" exclaimed her aunt, upon seeing the new convert help herself to sherry next day at lunch, "why, you were the very first to take the pledge at last night's total abstinence meeting!" "Yes, aunt, but that was to set an example." As Johnson relapsed next day and henceforth into slovenliness, the only lesson he taught Goldsmith was the last the poet needed—to alternate extreme untidiness with extreme coxcombry of attire.

Here, then, was the beginning of a friendship justly dearer to Goldsmith than any made in London, with the possible exception of that with Sir Joshua Reynolds. Both what was like and what was unlike in their respective characters mutually attracted Johnson and Goldsmith. To begin with, there was the masculine and feminine mutual attraction, by which not contrary so much as complementary qualities are drawn towards each other and, so to say, dovetail into each other. Goldsmith's diffidence, dependence and sensitiveness at once looked up to and leaned upon Johnson's strong mind, stout heart and Gulliver-like insensibility to Lilliputian arrows. But, again, these two men were drawn together by that in which they resembled each other probably more than any other two men in all London—exquisite tenderness of heart. And this tenderness, once more, was quickened and deepened in each through the similarity of their Grub Street experiences. Indeed, Johnson had sunk in deeper depths than Goldsmith ever sounded—depths which even his stout heart could not recall without a shudder—though no man had a more robust scorn for sentimental sorrow than Johnson—a scorn which he could not hide even from Goldsmith when the poet appealed to him by his tears for sympathy upon the partial failure of *The Good-Natured Man*. Yet Johnson himself once and in the presence of a stranger broke down hysterically under a merely sentimental sorrow. While reciting at the Thrales and in the presence of Mr Scott, a stranger, his *Vanity of Human Wishes*, his voice faltered when he came to the lines describing the struggles of a scholar's life, and at their close

he broke down in tears. He broke down in tears as he read—

“There mark what ills the scholar’s life assail,
TOIL, ENVY, WANT, THE PATRON AND THE JAIL!”

The lines do not appeal pathetically to the reader, because he has no associations with them. Heine paints a pathetic picture of a French drummer, a survivor of the horrors of the retreat from Moscow. Had the reader heard his music it would have sounded to him only the hard and hollow rattle of a drum; but to this old soldier of Napoleon, as he beat it, looking up the while at Heine with dim, hollow and abysmal eyes, it recalled all the horror of that appalling retreat. Well, Johnson had had his Moscow, and no veteran of Napoleon ever fought a harder fight, or bore himself in battle more stoutly, or showed in defeat a more stubborn and stoic fortitude; but when the campaign was over, and when, like that French drummer, he repeated and recalled his own music—lines written with his heart’s blood—then the beat of that muffled drum broke him down. It was not, then, the lines but their associations which shook Johnson’s stout heart. It was the memories they recalled of the struggles, sufferings, privations and humiliations he had endured—“the oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely, the insolence of office and the spurns which patient merit of the unworthy take.”

And Johnson’s struggles were not only fiercer than Goldsmith’s but also more protracted; while he had not to buoy him up Goldsmith’s “knack at hoping.” He was a congenial and confirmed hypochondriac, haunted continually by spectres of despondency and

despair. He hated even to be left for a moment alone and dreaded quitting any company to go to his lonely home as a child dreads to go in the dark. "There is not one of us here," he said once, on looking round at the gay crowd at Ranelagh, "there is not one of us here who is not afraid to go home and face himself." And there were times when on going home to face himself he would feel the horror that Frankenstein felt on the night when he returned to find the ghastly monster he had created waiting to avenge his creation. And, indeed, all Johnson's other trials and troubles—his struggles, sufferings, privations and humiliations, the hope deferred that made the heart sick, the disappointed hope which embittered the heart—all these were mere incidents and accidents, trifling and transient, compared with the rooted sorrow of a mind diseased.

"The mind is its own place and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."

And if that place is a prison—and it was a prison to Johnson—it is a prison from which there is no escape. "Denmark's a prison," says Hamlet to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, when they were sent by the king to spy upon him, and on their replying, "We think not so, my lord," Hamlet makes the answer which is the secret of all happiness and all misery, "Why, then, 'tis none to you; for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so: to me it is a prison." That is, the mind is the palate through which we taste everything, and, if the palate's diseased, everything will have a morbid taste—the sweet will taste bitter and the bitter acrid.

Johnson's palate was congenitally diseased. He was a confirmed hypochondriac, tormented continually, even in his least unhappy moments, by memories and remorse. He took the gloomiest views of life, of death, of his own spiritual state and prospects, and even of the mercy and goodness of God. Indeed, you might almost describe his whole life from the cradle to the grave in the well-known lines of Shelley :

“ Many a green isle needs must be
In the deep, wide sea of misery ;
Or the mariner, worn and wan,
Never thus could voyage on ;
Day and night, and night and day
Drifting on his dreary way,
With the solid darkness black
Closing round his vessel's track ;
Whilst above the sunless sky,
Big with clouds, hangs heavily.”

Thus, while Johnson's Grub Street struggles were more poignant and protracted than Goldsmith's, he lacked the poet's sanguine temperament which helped to buoy him up in these deep waters. On the other hand, Johnson was strong where Goldsmith was weak, and this strength was proof at once against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune from without and against despondency from within. Like Horatio Johnson was—

“ As one that in suffering all had suffered nothing ;
A man that fortune's buffets and rewards
Had ta'en with equal thanks. . .
Whose blood and judgment were so well commingled
That he was no pipe for Fortune's finger
To play what stop she pleased.”

And this strength of Johnson's was proof also and above all against the scouring of his mind by the ill-

usage of the world, and here he and Goldsmith were at one. When someone expressed to Goldsmith his wonder at Johnson's friendship with a man of disreputable antecedents, the poet exclaimed: "The man is now miserable, and that is enough to recommend him to Johnson." It was. Mere misery alone was to Johnson as the masonic sign of a brotherhood into which he had himself been initiated, and which he felt himself henceforth bound always to relieve. Of his pension of £300 a-year how much did he reserve for himself? Between £70 and £80. The balance of £220 or £230 he gave away to the poor. "They do not like to see me," he said, "unless I bring 'em money." And before the days of his pension, when he was himself the poorest of the poor, he would go without food to give others a breakfast. Poor little homeless lads, waifs and strays that lay down at night in the cruel streets of London, homeless, hungry, half-naked, lying in doorways or under archways, or on bunks, or in the recesses of bridges, would sometimes find in the morning when they woke a penny clenched in a grimy hand. It was Johnson. When he had but few pennies himself, and was himself but a homeless wanderer in those stony streets, he would force a penny into the little clenched hand for to-morrow morning's breakfast. The wretched lost woman, outcast in the London streets, lying senseless in the mud, Johnson takes up in his arms, bears her to his home, entrusts her to the care of his wife, and he and she together for thirteen long months nursed her and helped her back to the recovery of her lost health and strength, and to the recovery of her lost faith in the kindness of man and in the goodness of God. He turned his house into an almshouse for

old ladies who quarrelled with each other incessantly, and incessantly tormented him with their quarrels, but could never wear and weary out the charity which gave them shelter. When a friend asked him, "Why should you support and shelter so many worthless and thankless creatures?" he answered simply, "Sir, if I did not assist them, who would? They must then die of want." The poor and him that had no helper claimed kindred with Johnson, as having once been of their brotherhood, and always had their claim allowed. And Johnson showed the same sensitiveness to the clearer claims upon him of his kindred. "Sir," he said once to a young clergyman, Henry White, "sir, I cannot accuse myself of having been in general an undutiful son. Once, indeed, I was disobedient; I refused to attend my father to Uttoxeter market. Pride was the source of that refusal, and the remembrance was painful. A few years ago I desired to atone for this fault. I went to Uttoxeter in very bad weather, and stood for a considerable time bare-headed in the rain on the spot where my father's stall used to stand. In contrition I stood, and I hope the penance was expiatory." What a number of years of hardening hardships and still more hardening disappointments and rebuffs overlay this remorse for a transgression of his boyhood, and yet beneath them all it lay living, throbbing, poignant! What love and reverence, too, do his letters to his mother breathe! What touching tenderness does he show in parting even from an old servant, whom he loved because of her love for his mother. Indeed, I do not know many things more characteristic of Samuel Johnson than the following extract from his

private *Prayers and Meditations* which describes this parting :—

“Yesterday, 17th October, at about ten in the morning, I took my leave for ever of my dear old friend, Catherine Chambers, who came to live with my mother forty-three years ago, and has been little parted from us since. I desired all to withdraw, then told her that we were to part for ever, that, as Christians, we should part with prayer, and that I would, if she were willing, say a short prayer beside her. She expressed great desire to hear me, held up her poor hands as she lay in bed with great fervour, while I prayed, kneeling by her, nearly in the following words.” Here follows the prayer. “I then kissed her. She told me that to part was the greatest pain she had ever felt, and that she hoped we should meet again in a better place. I expressed with swelled eyes and great emotion of tenderness the same hope. We kissed and parted, I humbly hope to meet again and part no more.”

Such was the strong and true friend Goldsmith was now about to make, and love, and lean upon for the rest of his troubled life. It was the kind of friend of all others that he needed, for Johnson was a tower of strength to those that leaned upon him, and all he had endured had at once strengthened and sweetened his character. Not only, as Goldsmith said of him, “he had nothing of the bear about him except his skin,” and not only beneath this bearskin beat the tenderest of hearts, but the bearskin itself, like the skin of the polar bear, was a protective product against Arctic hardships. Johnson’s uncouth manners, I mean, were rather defensive than offensive — the outcome of a long and fierce

struggle with rough circumstances and harsh taskmasters.

Thus Goldsmith and Johnson were mutually attracted at once by what was like and by what was unlike in their respective characters, and indeed they became such special friends as to be caricatured and satirised as inseparable. It was naturally, then, to Johnson that Goldsmith owed his emergence from the purgatory of the Grub Street pot-boiler into the heaven of the immortals. Here is Johnson's own version of the incident :—

"I received one morning a message from poor Goldsmith that he was in great distress, and, as it was not in his power to come to me, begging that I would come to him as soon as possible. I sent him a guinea and promised to come to him directly. I accordingly went as soon as I was dressed, and found that his landlady had arrested him for his rent, at which he was in a violent passion. I perceived that he had already changed my guinea and had got a bottle of Madeira and a glass before him. I put the cork into the bottle, desired he would be calm, and began to talk to him of the means by which he might be extricated. He then told me that he had a novel ready for the Press, which he produced to me. I looked into it and saw its merit ; told the landlady I should soon return ; and, having gone to a bookseller, sold it for sixty pounds. I brought Goldsmith the money, and he discharged the rent, not without rating the landlady in a high tone for having used him so ill."

What seems to strike most every reader of this oft-quoted story of the birth of *The Vicar of Wakefield* is the improvidence of the author, who,

in the face of his dire distress, spent a good part of the guinea which Johnson, no doubt at some sacrifice, spared him, upon a bottle of Madeira. It recalls that other guinea Johnson procured for the poet Boyse when he was absolutely starving, which the bard spent forthwith upon a single sumptuous meal, only to be found next morning writing his rhapsodies in bed with his arms thrust through two slits in the blanket, his only covering, his only clothes! I should like, therefore, to be allowed to say in defence of Goldsmith that improvidence of this kind was so far from being peculiar to him that it was the badge of all his Grub Street tribe. Johnson used to denounce the intolerance which taunted any business or profession with the failing common to its members. And no doubt such taunts are not uncharitable merely but unreasonable, since the fact of any fault being common to any profession suggests that the conditions, not the professors, of the calling are responsible for its distinctive vice. To charge divines, doctors, lawyers, merchants, shopkeepers, artisans or working-men with some distinctive professional besetting sin is but to reproach the dyer because his hand "is subdued to what it works in." Thus the charge of improvidence usually made against authors, artists and actors should lead us to look for its cause, not in the characters, but in the circumstances of these Bohemians. Nor should we have to look far. A fixed income is to a precarious income as a coal mine is to a gold mine. The amount of coal extractable from a coal mine from day to day is calculable; but the incalculable chances of a gold reef tend to produce in the miner the proverbial improvidence of the gambler. A

similar gambling trust in the resources of their brains and in the chances of to-morrow is at the root of the proverbial improvidence of authors, artists and actors.

Before, then, we hold Goldsmith wholly responsible for his improvidence we should look both to his circumstances and to others in such circumstances. What contemporary author, who was dependent for his bread solely upon his pen, put Goldsmith to shame by his exemplary prudence? Smollett, Sterne, Fielding, even Johnson himself are here in the same dock. Even the bottle of wine incident, which has so discredited Goldsmith, can be paralleled in the life of his exemplary deliverer, Johnson. "Dr Johnson," says George Stevens, "confessed himself to have been sometimes in the power of the bailiffs." Richardson, the author of *Clarissa*, was his constant friend on such occasions. "I remember writing to him," said Johnson, "from a sponging-house, and was so sure of my deliverance through his kindness and liberality that, before his reply was brought, I knew I could afford to joke with the rascal who had me in custody, and did so over a pint of adulterated wine, for which at that instant I had no money to pay." Thus what Richardson did for Johnson, Johnson did for Goldsmith; and if the vicarious debt went back no further—if Richardson owed no one a similar extrication from similar difficulties—it was because he was a prosperous printer first and a popular novelist a long way after. No author, then, of that day, who had to depend for his bread on his pen alone, could afford to throw a stone at the improvidence of Goldsmith.

That Goldsmith should have owed his deliverance

from the bailiffs, that *The Vicar of Wakefield* should have owed its acceptance by a bookseller to Johnson, was as natural as it was fortunate; for there was no such friend of the friendless in his day as this Great Cham of literature and Great Bear of society. As all who love Goldsmith should love Johnson, I should like to close this chapter upon the beginning of their friendship with the indisputable testimony of an estranged friend to the exceeding goodness of Johnson's heart. "He loved the poor," says Mrs Thrale, "as I never saw anyone else do, with an earnest desire to make them happy. 'What signifies,' says someone to him, 'giving halfpence to common beggars. They only lay it out in gin and tobacco.' 'And why should they be denied such sweeteners of their existence?' replied Johnson. 'It is surely very savage to refuse them every possible avenue of pleasure reckoned too coarse for our own acceptance. Life is a pill which none of us can bear to swallow without gilding; yet for the poor we delight in stripping it barer still, and are not ashamed to show visible displeasure if ever the bitter taste is taken from their mouths.'"

It was the kindness of a kindred spirit which inspired Elia's *A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis*.

Hear, again, Mrs Thrale upon Johnson's kindness to those ill-conditioned pensioners who filled his home, wrangling incessantly together, and unanimous only in their grumbles against their benefactor. Johnson himself, in a letter to Mrs Thrale, thus describes this happy family:—"Mrs Williams hates everybody. Levett hates Mrs Desmoulins and does not love Mrs Williams. Mrs Desmoulins hates them

both. Poll"—a Miss Carmichael—"loves none of them." "He used to lament pathetically to me," says Mrs Thrale, in reference to such complaints from Johnson, "that they made his life miserable from the impossibility he found of making them happy. If, however, I ventured to blame their ingratitude and condemn their conduct, he would instantly set about softening the one and justifying the other; and finished commonly by telling me that I knew not how to make allowance for situations I never experienced."

No casual, occasional or emotional kindness can compare with such unweariable beneficence to beneficiaries who kept him in continual discomfort with their complaints, their quarrels, their ingratitude and their unhappiness.

CHAPTER XIII

"THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD"

THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD, or rather a third share of it, as we have seen, was sold by Johnson to save Goldsmith's being sent to jail for a debt of a few pounds due for his board and lodging, and this is characteristic of the bitter, and, it might be supposed, embittering conditions under which much of it was written. Indeed, while writing it Goldsmith had been in hiding for debt, and had been flung half-crowns and even shillings by Newbery as generous advances. Another bookseller, Dodsley, had declined to make him any advance; while a third, Tonson, had rejected Goldsmith's offer to edit Pope so insolently that the poet was enraged into caning the bearer of the offensive refusal. These difficulties and humiliations were none the less embittering because Goldsmith had, and knew that he had, brought many of them upon himself. Only those superior persons who have never brought anything upon themselves can suppose that punishment is lightened by the consciousness of having deserved it. But there were also other miseries and mortifications which no one could have deserved less than Goldsmith or have felt more—those due to the brutality of his various task-masters—which must be taken into account in considering the circumstances under which *The Vicar of Wakefield* was written. And the circumstances should be considered in order to do justice to

the originality of the novel. For, look at it from what point of view you will, *The Vicar of Wakefield* is an extraordinary novel. To begin with, what novel written in circumstances so embittering was ever so untainted with bitterness? Tainted with bitterness! It is the humanest novel in all literature, welling up out of the heart of Goldsmith in the midst of his miseries, like those founts of sweet water that spring up in the midst of the brine and bitterness of the Pacific. And while *The Vicar of Wakefield* contrasts in its humanity with the bitterness of Goldsmith's environment when he wrote it, in its purity it contrasts with the pruriency, the grossness, or the foulness of contemporary novels — with Richardson's *Pamela*, Fielding's *Tom Jones* and Smollett's *Roderick Random*. One other contrast between Goldsmith's writing and that of his contemporaries must also be noted—a contrast in style. The limpid simplicity and sincerity of Goldsmith's style were in startling contrast with the pompous pretentiousness of the style which Johnson had made the vogue.

Hence Goldsmith's style did not appeal to the critics whose taste is usually sophisticated. All experts, including critics, come in time to make something of a "mystery" of their trade, after the manner of doctors who, says Cicero, make out a prescription for a snail thus:—"terrigenam, herbigradum, domiportam, sanguine cassum." Hence it happens that in a conflict of taste between the public and the critics the public is sometimes right. In a conversation upon this subject—about the possibility of the taste of the public differing from that of the critics—Johnson cites Goldsmith as a case in point. In justifying his hesitation to pass an unfavourable verdict upon an unpublished work

which had been submitted to his judgment, Johnson said, "You never can be sure whether, though it may not please you, it may please the public. Both Goldsmith's comedies were once refused; his first by Garrick, his second by Colman, who was prevailed on at last by much solicitation, nay by a kind of force, to bring it on. His *Vicar of Wakefield* I myself did not think would have much success. It was written and sold to a bookseller before his *Traveller*, but published after it; so little expectation had the bookseller from it. Had it been sold after the *Traveller* he might have had twice as much money for it, though sixty guineas was no mean price. The bookseller had the advantage of Goldsmith's reputation from the *Traveller* in the sale, though Goldsmith had it not in selling the copy." The "cooks," as Martial called the critics, are not always right, nor the "guests" always wrong in any conflict of judgment between them, and anyway it is more to an author's advantage to please the guests!

"Cænæ fercula nostræ
Mallem convivis quam placuisse cocis."

When the public happens to be right in any such conflict of taste, the root of the difference will always be found to be that which is one of the roots of the difference between genius and talent—genius ever returning to nature, talent always diverging from it. Talent trusts to art and ornament for the charms which genius has in right of her sole trust to nature. It is a little like the difference between the youth and age of the maid in *The Deserted Village*:—

"As some fair female, unadorned and plain,
Secure to please while youth confirms her reign,

Slights every borrowed charm which dress supplies,
 Nor shares with art the triumph of her eyes.
 But when those charms are past—for charms are frail—
 When time advances, and when lovers fail,
 She then shines forth, solicitous to bless,
 In all the glaring impotence of dress."

This quarrel between genius and talent for the ear of the public is ever recurring in literary history—genius trying in vain for years to bring back to nature the taste which talent had sophisticated.

This was the battle which the genius of Goldsmith had to fight in his day, and he fought it alone with a strength and a courage impossible to the feeble creature described by Boswell. In the days of his severest struggles he declined even Johnson's request that he would contribute to Fawkes and Woty's *Poetic Calendar*, because of his disapproval of the false and affected school it represented. "Nothing," he says in one of his essays, "has been so often explained and so little understood as simplicity in writing. Simplicity in this acceptation has a larger significance than either the *ἀπλόν* of the Greeks or the *simplex* of the Latins; for it implies beauty. It is the *ἀπλόν καὶ ἡδυν* of Demetrius Phalerius, the *simplex munditiis* of Horace, and expressed by one word, *naïveté*, in the French language. It is, in fact, no other than beautiful nature without affectation or extraneous ornament. By the present mode of education we are forcibly warped from the bias of nature and all simplicity in manners is rejected. We are taught to disguise and distort our sentiments until the faculty of thinking is diverted into an unnatural channel; and we not only relinquish and forget, but also become incapable of our original dispositions. We are totally

changed into creatures of art and affectation. Our perception is abused and even our senses are perverted. Our minds lose their native force and flavour. The imagination, sweated by artificial fire, produces nought but vapid bloom. The genius, instead of growing like a vigorous tree, extending its branches on every side and bearing delicious fruit, resembles a stunted yew, tortured into some wretched form, projecting no shade, displaying no flavour, diffusing no fragrance, yielding no fruit, and affording nothing but a barren conceit for the amusement of the idle spectator."

Perhaps De Baudelaire's definition of genius is as apt and adequate as any yet suggested of that indefinite and indefinable gift—"La génie n'est que l'enfance retrouvée à volonté." Ruskin, too, in his *Stones of Venice*, makes the same suggestion in his comparison there of men of genius to children. In this, as in so many other things, Goldsmith was a child, which helps to explain the slow way he made against the sophisticated taste of the time. *The Vicar of Wakefield*, for instance, was tossed aside into a drawer by the younger Newbery—to whom Johnson had sold it—as an unlucky speculation; nor did even the success of *The Traveller*, as Johnson suggests, hasten its publication. It was eight months after the fourth edition of *The Traveller* had appeared, and fifteen months after *The Vicar* had come into his possession that Newbery at last summoned up sufficient courage to publish it. And it needed courage to publish it even then. Not one of the leading journals noticed it at all on its appearance, while the few inferior prints which condescended to review it spoke of it coldly and baldly. It was

at once too old and too new, too simple and too original for the professional critic, who could see in it only the "hundred faults" which Goldsmith in his preface admitted it to have. As Southey says, the novel was "a puzzler to its critics." They were immersed too deeply in the literature in vogue to see any beauty in it, like that lady who, when crinolines were in fashion, thought the Greek dress bald, odd and ugly. *The Vicar* needed for its appreciation the detachment of distance or of time, the unprejudiced judgment of the Courts to which Bacon appealed—foreign nations and the next ages. To both appeals the answer is this, that *The Vicar of Wakefield* has appeared in more editions and in more translations than any novel that ever was written. Four years after its publication the cynical Herder, after exposing and exploding Goethe's boyish idols, read out to him as a new and true ideal a German translation of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and Goethe listened entranced. Half a century later, writing to Zelter, Goethe recalls the impression made upon him in these his impressionable years by the novel Herder had read out:—

"It is not to be described the effect that Goldsmith's *Vicar* had upon me, just at the critical moment of mental development. That lofty and benevolent irony, that fair and indulgent view of all infirmities and faults, that meekness under all calamities, that equanimity under all changes and chances, and the whole train of kindred virtues, whatever names they bear, proved my best education; and in the end these are the thoughts and feelings which have reclaimed us from all the errors of life."

And when he re-read the novel in old age he was

not disillusioned, for it had still for him all the charm and all the edification he found in it at that crisis of his intellectual development.

Whence then this originality of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, which made it a "puzzlement" to English critics and a revelation to Goethe? It comes from this, that the novel is Goldsmith himself. Hence, too, the contrasts between its humanity and the inhumanity of Goldsmith's environment, and between its purity and the impurity of contemporary novels. *The Vicar of Wakefield*, in a word, was no mere creature of his embittering circumstance, was no mere imitation of his gross, or foul, or prurient contemporary novelists, was no mere reflection of the sickly or sickening tastes of his age. It is Goldsmith himself. Its finest characters are impersonations of his own characteristics, and the experiences of his hero were the experiences of himself. His own simple vanity, his own child-like gullibility, the divine sweetness of his nature, the more divine goodness of his heart are all there, and *because* they are all there the novel is the most enduringly and universally popular novel in literature.

What Goldsmith says, perhaps sarcastically, in *Retaliation*, of Cumberland is as true of himself in *The Vicar of Wakefield* as it was untrue of that *Sir Fretful Plagiary* :—

"Or wherefore his characters thus without fault?
Say, was it that vainly directing his view
To find out men's virtues, and finding them few,
Quite sick of pursuing each troublesome elf,
He grew lazy at last and drew from himself?"

When I said in the introductory chapter to this little book that if you wish to find the real Gold-

smith you will find him more faithfully reflected in his own works than in the accounts of his contemporaries or in the biographies of his biographers, I had *The Vicar of Wakefield* most in my mind. In this novel Goldsmith most of all manifests himself. It is his own humanity which shines through the novel, as sunlight through the stained and storied windows of a cathedral. The figures may be different and the colours different, but it is the same sun which transfigures all.

When I say the novel is Goldsmith I do not mean merely, as I said just now, that he distributed through it his own characteristics and his own experiences. That, of course, is true. The early experiences of Mr Burchell, the adventures of George, the vanity and simplicity of Moses, the humanity of the vicar, are all the experiences, the adventures, the simplicity, the humanity of Goldsmith himself. But I mean something more than this when I say that Goldsmith *is* the novel. As a prism divides and disperses white light into its component rays—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet—so Goldsmith similarly distributed his own characteristics and his own experiences through the personages and through the incidents of the novel. But behind all these rays of the spectrum, comprehending and comprising them all, is the pure white light making what was bright brighter, and lightening darkness itself, and that is the spirit of the novel—the spirit of Goldsmith—and that, too, is the secret of its universal and enduring popularity. It is its divine humanity, and the sincerity of its humanity. It is not cant; it is not sentiment; it is not Sterne; it is not Rousseau; it is Goldsmith. It is not a man who affected to feel or think the humanity it paints; it is not a man who

merely felt it or thought it; it is a man who felt it, who thought it, who loved it, who lived it, who *was* it. "Goldsmith," says Thackeray, "is the most loved of all authors," and he is the most loved because he loved most, and because his love shines and shows through every page of this divine novel. As in life Goldsmith was the most transparent of men—every thought of his heart showing itself clear as the pebbles at the bottom of a mountain brook, or, like the bubbles of that brook, rising in speech to the surface—so in his works, too, and especially in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, he opens to us his whole heart. And it is his heart, beating in every page of the novel, which makes such a wide and deep appeal to the heart of humanity. Men love those who love them, and it is the overflowing humanity of the novel which has most of all endeared it to its readers. As Scott said of it, "We bless the memory of an author who contrives so well to reconcile us to human nature."

In truth, Goldsmith, in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, has done a unique thing. By his simple truth to simple nature, by his gentle humour, wit, wisdom and pathos, and by the exquisite charm of an idyllic style, he has made goodness as interesting as greatness. Alone of all the novels that live *The Vicar of Wakefield* lives in right of its appeal to what is divine within us. Of course, there are novels without number which make an appeal to what is divine within us; but they don't live. They are namby-pamby, goody-goody, insipid with the insipidity Guinevere wearied of:—

"He is all fault who hath no fault at all.

The low sun makes the colour."

But what novel, except *The Vicar of Wakefield*, lives for all time, and is loved in all lands through the divine right of its divine humanity? I cannot help asking the reader once more to think, as he reads the novel, of the life of the man when he wrote it—his degrading surroundings, his debasing associates, his bitter and embittering experiences—and to wonder how he has subdued all, transformed and transfigured all, drawn from all sweetness and light, as the flower draws its fairness and fragrance from the dung of the earth. It is not only, to recur to that image of St Augustine's, the sun shining through foul mists without being befouled, but it is the sun at its setting transfiguring with its own glow and glory the clouds which would have obscured it.

CHAPTER XIV

"THE TRAVELLER"

WHEN Goldsmith flung out by the hands of Johnson *The Vicar of Wakefield* to keep the wolf from the door, he said nothing even to this dear friend of another child of his brain which might have been sacrificed instead. *The Traveller* lay also at that moment completed in his desk, but he withheld it, and even all mention of it, as too dear and sacred to be brought into such a sordid business. Soon after, however, Goldsmith submitted it to Johnson, who not only approved of it, but "improved" it. He interpolated half a dozen lines of this jolting sort :—

"How small of all that human hearts endure,
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure!"

The change from Goldsmith's verse to lines like these is as the change from the graceful sailing of the swan down stream to its waddle upon the bank. In another way also Johnson's help was unfortunate, since, when it became known that he had had a hand in the poem, it was assumed that he wrote most of it. This assumption was strengthened by Johnson's characteristic correction of Goldsmith at "The Club."

"Mr Goldsmith," asked Chamier at a meeting of "The Club," "what do you mean by the last word in the first line of your *Traveller*?—

"'Remote, unfriended, melancholy, *slow*.'"

Do you mean tardiness of locomotion?" "Yes," answered Goldsmith. "No, sir," thundered Johnson, "you did not mean tardiness of locomotion; you meant that sluggishness of mind which comes upon a man in solitude." "Ah," exclaimed Goldsmith, "that was what I meant." As slowness of gait indicates depression of spirits, as much as briskness implies exhilaration, no doubt Goldsmith intended to suggest dejection. Being, however, flurried and disconcerted, as he usually was in that overpowering company, he agreed in turn with each of his challengers. The effect of this explanation by Johnson to Goldsmith of what he really did mean was of course to suggest that the "Inspired Idiot" owed much of his inspiration to his great friend. "Chamier," said Johnson afterwards, "believed then that I had written the line as much as if he had seen me write it."

It was not Johnson only who treated Goldsmith as a half-articulate baby, but even Tom Davies, the butt himself of all his friends, was good enough to explain what the poet really did mean by "Damien's bed of steel." "Doctor Goldsmith," writes this pompous little man, "says he meant by 'Damien's bed of steel' the rack; but I believe the newspapers informed us that he was confined in a high tower, and actually obliged to lie upon an iron bed." What! Tom Davies too!

"The little dogs and all,
Tray, Blanch and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me!"

This patronising arrogance, which was the usual tone towards Goldsmith of his London friends, must have been especially exasperating to so sensitive a soul. I remember an aunt of mine, who, having

come from Drogheda, might therefore be presumed to know the proper pronunciation of the name of that town, being corrected by a Manchester shopwoman for saying “Draweda.” “I suppose you mean ‘Drogeeda,’ madam,” said this superb person. “No,” rejoined my aunt, “I mean Draweda; and, as I was born there, I ought to know that the people of that town themselves pronounce it thus.” “I can well believe it,” retorted the shopwoman with a shrug of scorn.

Smug and invincible arrogance of this exasperating kind met Goldsmith in London at every turn, irritating, disconcerting and depressing him. For it must be remembered, and I hope I may be pardoned for the continual reminder to the reader, that the set and single attitude of all this circle towards Goldsmith was that of patronage, either condescending or contemptuous. With what a vindictive gusto, for example, does Miss Reynolds, Sir Joshua’s sister and housekeeper and Johnson’s “Rennie dear,” recall and record this crushing snub Goldsmith received. “Goldsmith,” she writes, “always appeared to be overawed by Johnson, particularly when in company with people of consequence—always as if impressed with some fear of disgrace; and, indeed, well he might. I have been witness to many mortifications he has suffered in Dr Johnson’s company. One day in particular, at Sir Joshua’s table, a gentleman to whom Goldsmith was talking his best stopped him in the midst of his discourse with, ‘Hush! hush! Dr Johnson is going to say something.’”

Mrs Piozzi with no less vindictive gusto tells of a similar snub. “Goldsmith and Johnson,” she writes, “spent an evening with Eaton Graham at

some tavern. Graham's heart was open and he began inviting away; told what he could do to make his college agreeable, and begged the visit might not be delayed. Goldsmith thanked him and proposed setting out with Mr Johnson for Buckinghamshire in a fortnight. 'Nay, hold, Dr *Minor*,' says Graham, 'I did not invite *you*!'"

Now I ask what must have been the general feeling and bearing towards Goldsmith when two ladies, who must be credited with some of their sex's social sensitiveness, could quote with approval such brutalities? Yes, and even to-day like brutalities are quoted still as happy, even though the relative proportions of "Doctor Major" and of "Doctor Minor" are reversed; for I suppose no one to-day will deny that the author of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *The Traveller*, *The Deserted Village*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, and *The Chinese Letters*, is of incomparably greater literary account than the author of *Rasselas*, *Irene*, *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, *The Lives of the Poets* and *The Rambler*. Yes, even to-day the contempt of the contemptible Boswell still infects the very biographers of Goldsmith. They forget that in Boswell's *Life* Goldsmith's place and part, his relation to Johnson, are those of the dwarf to the giant in the apologue in *The Vicar of Wakefield*. In that ill-starred association the giant carries off in the campaign all the spoil and glory and the luckless dwarf all the mutilations and humiliations. Boswell even attributes the inspiration of *The Traveller* to the conversation of Johnson! though the plan of the poem was conceived and some of it was written while Goldsmith was on tramp through Europe and long before his acquaintance

with Johnson. "Much both of the sentiments and expression of *The Traveller*," says Boswell, "were derived from conversation with Johnson!" This recalls Johnson's humorous reason for not associating with one Campbell, that all Scotchmen would ever after such association say of anything good he published, "Ay, he got that fro' Cawmell." But as Johnson could not have got breeches from this highlander, neither could Goldsmith have got from Johnson his grace, his tenderness, his *naïveté*, his melody, nor even his philosophy. The very title which Johnson suggested for the poem, *The Philosophic Wanderer*, as compared with that given it by Goldsmith, indicates a radical difference between their ideas of poetry. Goldsmith's ideal was simplicity, and what he approved of in Parnell he aimed at himself—"that the language of poetry should be as the language of life, and should convey the warmest thoughts in the simplest expression."

Nor, again, does that other comparison which continually recurred in the journals of the day, of Goldsmith to Pope, bear examination. The poetry of Pope and Goldsmith is about as mutually comparable as a diamond with an opal. What has the ice-cold glitter of the geometrically-cut facets of the diamond in common with the shifting, tender, rainbow tints of the opal?

The truth is, as it seemed inconceivable to his friends that Goldsmith could be absolutely original, he got even from them during his life small credit for originality either of thought or expression. "Even from them," I ought rather to say least of all from his friends. When years later someone said to Johnson that *The Traveller* owed much of its

popularity to the partiality of Goldsmith's friends, he replied, "Nay, sir, the partiality of his friends was always *against* Goldsmith. It was with difficulty we could give him a hearing."

After his death, of course, when praise might be lavished upon him, because it would then do him no good and give him no pleasure, his friends were free to admit the originality as well as the beauty of the poem; for what Hudibras says of his lady's love is true also of fame, which

"As idly burns
As fire in antique Roman urns
To warm the dead and vainly light
Those only that see nothing by 't."

Four years after Goldsmith's death Langton observed at Sir Joshua's table, "There is not one bad line in that poem of *The Traveller*—not one of Dryden's careless verses." "I am glad," replied Sir Joshua, "to hear Charles Fox say it was one of the finest poems in the English language." "Why were you glad?" rejoined Langton. "You surely had no doubt of this before?" "No," cried Johnson, emphatically, "the merit of *The Traveller* is so well established that Mr Fox's praise cannot augment it nor his censure diminish it."

But Johnson said the simple truth in contending that during Goldsmith's life "the partiality of his friends was always against him. It was with difficulty we could give him a hearing." Unfortunately for Goldsmith his position and reputation in "The Club" that is, with his literary friends, were fixed before he had achieved such eminence as *The Traveller* must have given him.

That pompous Philistine, Sir John Hawkins, thus fairly enough defines Goldsmith's position and

reputation with “The Club” before the publication of *The Traveller*. “As he wrote for the booksellers we at the Club looked on him as a mere literary drudge, equal to the task of compiling and translating, but little capable of original and still less of poetical composition.” A first and persistent impression of this kind made most of all against a temperament like Goldsmith’s, sensitive, self-conscious, and easily disconcerted. Had he entered “The Club” as the author of the finest poem, play and novel of the day, he would have had conceded to him such deference as must have reassured his morbid self-distrust; and this very concession would have justified itself. At his ease in an assured position he would not have been thrown off his balance by Beauclerk’s sarcasm, Hawkins’ brutality, or Johnson’s bludgeoning; while neither Hawkins, Beauclerk nor Boswell would have dreamed of treating him as a butt. Entering “The Club” “a very great man,” as Johnson—after his death—pronounced him, his wise and witty sayings, which even in Boswell’s record were many, would be marked, and his Irish extravagances would be disregarded or regarded only as Irish extravagances. Entering “The Club” “as a mere literary drudge,” he was treated with a contempt which sometimes justified itself, since he lost his head when he lost his confidence. Thus he would flounder sometimes into absurdities, and these absurdities would be noted, while all that was witty or wise in his talk would be discredited or disregarded. The average mind is focussed to see only what it is, so to say, set for—only absurdity in a person presumed to be absurd, and only brilliancy or profundity in a person presumed to be brilliant or profound.

I was chairman once at an entertainment where the most effective reciter I had ever heard, a Mr Mullen, kept his audience in roars of laughter by a succession of farcical recitations. At last I begged him to give the audience the relief of a pathetic piece, knowing that his pathetic recitations were even more effective than his comic. He stood up accordingly and recited his great piece, a really harrowing poem on the death of a collier's little child, and every verse and almost every line of this piteous and piteously recited piece was received with shouts and shrieks of laughter! The audience had got it into its head that Mr Mullen was a funny man, and their minds being set and focussed upon this idea, they found even his pathos amusing. Similarly, minds of this kind will be always on the look-out only for the absurd in a man who has got a name for absurdity, especially if he be sufficiently conspicuous to be a target for detraction. Then, not only the paradox of an "Inspired Idiot" pleases, but the uninspired are pleased to think him an idiot in spite of his inspiration.

Thus in two ways Goldsmith was unfortunate in entering "The Club" before he had made his reputation. As an acknowledged man of genius he would have been treated with a respect reassuring to his easily disconcerted diffidence; while his established reputation would have set the minds of his friends to observe and note all—and there would be much—which answered to that reputation, and to disregard as the mere foam on swiftly poured-out wine what might in itself seem extravagant or absurd.

No one, for example, who knew Goldsmith only through *The Traveller* could have formed the

impression of him fostered by Boswell and echoed by Macaulay, the impression that he lacked powers of observation and of reflection—"that he had seen much of the world; but had noticed and retained little more of what he had seen than some grotesque incidents and characters which had happened to strike his fancy"—since, as I have already suggested, the characters of the peoples amongst whom he sojourned for so short a time have never been more adequately and accurately delineated than in *The Traveller*. Again, *The Traveller* refutes another charge of Macaulay's, that Goldsmith lacked powers of reflection. "For accurate research or grave disquisition," writes Macaulay, "Goldsmith was not well qualified by nature or education. He knew nothing accurately; his reading had been desultory; nor had he meditated deeply on what he had read." It is true that Goldsmith's reading was desultory and his knowledge miscellaneous and loose; but this is to say only that he was a poet. A poet's scholarship is seldom exact, methodical or profound. He prefers to look direct at nature and life to studying them reflected and re-reflected in the dim repeating mirrors of books. But, though it is certainly true that Goldsmith's reading was desultory and his knowledge inaccurate and discursive, it is not true at all that he never meditated deeply upon what he had seen or read. Indeed, I cannot imagine how Macaulay, who was credited with reading everything, and who credited himself with knowing everything, could speak thus of Goldsmith, who was the first to suggest reforms that have since been carried out, and the first to predict revolutions that have since shaken two worlds.

Within the four hundred and thirty lines of *The*

Traveller alone we shall find deep, sound and philosophic thought, disguised from us often by the symmetrical grace of the poetry, as the grace of a Greek athlete masks his strength. Here is the dry thesis Goldsmith sets himself to prove :—

“Hence every state to one loved blessing prone,
Conforms and models life to that alone ;
Each to the favourite happiness attends,
And spurns the plan that aims at other ends ;
Till carried to excess in each domain,
This favourite good begets peculiar pain.”

But the illustrations by which he supports this thesis are so beautiful that we rest in them and forget the solid structure they were designed to uphold. The Caryatides are such exquisitely sculptured statues, they arrest and rivet the eye. But the philosophy is there as well as the poetry ; and it is neither trite, nor shallow, nor unsound. The general conclusion is not perhaps universally or at least absolutely true :—

“If countries we compare,
And estimate the blessings which they share.
Though patriots flatter, still shall wisdom find
An equal portion dealt to all mankind ;
As different good by Art or Nature given,
To different nations makes their blessings even.”

No doubt we can get used to everything—even to hell, as Mammon comfortably suggests :—

“Our torments also may in length of time
Become our elements ; these piercing fires
As soft as now severe—our temper changed
Into their temper—which must needs remove
The sensible of pain.”

Or as *The Traveller* itself has it :—

“And though the rocky-crested summits frown,
These rocks by custom turn to beds of down.”

But there is more than this in Goldsmith's doctrine that every nation has its compensatory blessings, and also that these blessings themselves, so to say, run to seed :—

“Where wealth and freedom reign, contentment fails,
And honour sinks where commerce long prevails.”

By the way, it is significant that the sole fault found in *The Traveller* with the Briton is arrogant unsociability. At the close of that fine outburst which Johnson could not quote without a starting tear :—

“Stern o'er each bosom reason holds her state,
With daring aims irregularly great.
Pride in their port, defiance in their eye,
I see the lords of human kind pass by ;
Intent on high designs, a thoughtful band,
By forms unfashioned, fresh from Nature's hand,
Fierce in their native hardiness of soul,
True to imagined right, above control,
While e'en the peasant boasts these rights to scan,
And learns to venerate himself as man ;”

At the close, I say, of this noble panegyric Goldsmith as usual defines the shadow cast by each national distinctive virtue, and in the Briton's case this shadow is insular and insulating arrogance :—

“That independence Britons prize too high,
Keeps man from man and breaks the social tie.
The self-dependent lordling stands alone,
All claims that bind and sweeten life unknown ;
Here by the bonds of nature feebly held,
Minds combat minds, repelling and repelled.”

No one felt more this stiff, stand-off, frigid and freezing unsociability, never off-guard itself, and never understanding such relaxation in another, as this genial, effusive Irishman, Goldsmith. Most of all in "The Club" he found them always on the offensive or on the defensive or on the offensive-defensive — "minds combat minds, repelling and repelled." To enter that cockpit of "The Club," you should strip yourself of every feather not meant for flight or fight.

But there was another folly, beside that of his frivolous talk, which made Goldsmith seem an idiot to solid, sensible, practical men—the lack of worldly wisdom shown by the dedication of *The Traveller* to his brother. No one knew better than Goldsmith, as *The Vicar of Wakefield* shows, to what profitable service a dedication might be turned, while no one stood in sorer need of such service than the poor poet; yet he dedicates the poem to a man "who, despising fame and fortune, retired early to happiness and obscurity with an income of forty pounds a year"—only because that man was his brother. How folly of this kind was regarded by the men from whom chiefly we derive our knowledge of Goldsmith, may be inferred from the following account of a fellow-clubman, the worthy Sir John Hawkins, of Goldsmith's interview with the Earl of Northumberland:—

"Having one day a call to wait on the late Duke, then Earl, of Northumberland," says the knight, "I found Goldsmith waiting for an audience in an outer room. I asked him what had brought him there; he told me an invitation from his lordship. I made my business as short as I could, and, as a reason,

mentioned that Dr Goldsmith was waiting without. The Earl asked me if I was acquainted with him ; I told him I was, adding what I thought likely to recommend him. Upon Goldsmith's coming out I asked him the result of his conversation. ‘His lordship,’ says he, ‘told me he had read my poem, *The Traveller*, and was much delighted with it ; that he was going Lord-Lieutenant to Ireland, and that, hearing that I was a native of that country, he should be glad to do me any kindness.’ ‘And what did you answer,’ I asked, ‘to this generous offer?’ ‘Why,’ said he, ‘I could say nothing but that I had a brother there, a clergyman, that stood in need of help.’

“Thus,” comments Sir John, “did this idiot in the affairs of the world trifle with his fortunes and put back the hand that was held out to assist him !”

When men of this sort call Goldsmith “an idiot,” it is as well to remember what appeared to them to be idiotic.

CHAPTER XV

"THE GOOD-NATURED MAN."

THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD, which was sold to deliver Goldsmith from the bailiffs, whom Newbery had let slip upon him (for Mrs Fleming, Goldsmith's inexorable landlady, was a creature of Newbery's), contains this inexplicable compliment to that worthy:—"The person was no other than the philanthropic bookseller in St Paul's Churchyard, who has written so many little books for children. He called himself their friend, but he was the friend of all mankind." I should rather have identified him with the philanthropist immortalised in *An Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog*, or in that on *Mrs Mary Blaize* :—

"A kind and gentle heart he had,
To comfort friends and foes ;
The naked every day he clad,
When he put on his clothes."

"The needy seldom passed the door,
And always found her kind :
She freely lent to all the poor—
Who left a pledge behind."

Certainly Newbery took care to get more than a pawnbroker's interest on every pound he advanced to Goldsmith. Neither could the Newbery nephew, to whom both *The Traveller* and *The Vicar of Wakefield* were sold, be truthfully called "the friend of all mankind," unless Goldsmith be excepted.

Though edition after edition of the novel and of the poem were published within a few years, not a farthing of the hundreds of pounds they brought in found its way into Goldsmith's pocket. Indeed, the very Saturday in May 1766 on which the second edition of *The Vicar of Wakefield* followed hard upon the first, a bill for fifteen guineas, which Goldsmith had drawn upon the elder Newbery, was dishonoured.

Neither was the nephew moved by the fast multiplying editions of *The Traveller* to add another guinea to the original twenty paid for the poem. On the other hand, a poem by Anstey, called *The New Bath Guide*, brought its immortal author two hundred pounds. Immortal, at least in the judgment of Horace Walpole, which should be held to outweigh that of Time. "*Victrix causa Diis placuit; sed victa Catoni.*" And here perhaps I may be allowed a digression to give the reader an idea of the value of the judgment of the critic who pronounced Goldsmith "An Inspired Idiot."

In his *Memoirs of the Reign of George III.*, Horace Walpole devotes a chapter to the literature of the early part of this reign, and in this chapter a single line each is given to Goldsmith, to Smollett, to Johnson, and not even a single line to Sterne. Goldsmith makes his first and last and brief appearance in the *Memoirs* as the correct author of *The Traveller*. Smollett's sole distinction is that of "a profligate hireling and abusive Jacobite writer"; while Johnson is "a lumber of mean opinions and prostituted learning."

On the other hand, pages of panegyric are devoted to the immortals—Mrs Macaulay for her *History*;

Bentley for his *Patriotism*; Dalrymple for his *Rodondo*; and, above all, to Anstey for his *New Bath Guide*. It will be seen that in his literary judgments Horace Walpole could hardly be called an *inspired* idiot, since time has reversed them all.

But to return to "the friend of all mankind," Newbery, Goldsmith found him, when in need of sixpence—and he was always in need of sixpence—"a Friend of Humanity." Goldsmith was always in need of sixpence not because of his improvidence merely, but because of his gullibility and generosity. He was the merest milch-cow "with udders all drawn dry" by a host of milkers. A report that Goldsmith was in funds was such a signal for pillage as the Arab cry of "A Caravan!" and within an hour Oliver was as poor as the poorest of his beneficiaries.

Why, then, it might fairly be asked, should Newbery be expected to pour gold through this mere conduit-pipe? Newbery was a business man; and his business was to get the most copy at the least cost out of Goldsmith—as he did diligently. He had to make him such advances as would keep him alive and in his employ; but here, as a good business man, his duty ended. Certainly; and I am not questioning his claim to being a good business man, but only doubting whether that is absolutely synonymous with his being a good man, not to say with his being "the friend of all mankind." I am only in fact questioning the justice of Newbery's canonisation in *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

As, however, everything is relative, Newbery, as compared with Griffiths, or as compared with the lessee of Newbery's own son-in-law, Kit Smart, deserved to be called "the philanthropic bookseller."

This lessee of Kit Smart was a bookseller named Gardener, who rented Kit's brains on a lease of ninety-nine years, during which term the poet was bound by a legal instrument to write weekly and only for the *Universal Visitor*. We at least have no cause of quarrel with the arrangement, since the lease would have lapsed in time to allow Kit to start *The Saturday Review*, if another Universal Visitor had not prematurely claimed the poor poet. Compared, then, with the truculent Griffiths or the exacting Gardener, Newbery might appear a philanthropist, but he was hardly a liberal paymaster.

Here, *e.g.*, is a specimen of the scale of his payments to Goldsmith in a receipt from the poet still extant:—"Received from Mr Newbery five guineas for writing a short English Grammar. Oliver Goldsmith, Decr. 28, 1766." "And I shall compile," he says in *Retaliation*, thus at the close of his life summing up its main work—compilation. All the work by which we know him to-day—poems, plays and novel—were incidental. Like many another author, he lives for ever through work which could not keep him alive; while the dreary task-work which kept him alive—grammars, histories and countless other compilations—do not live themselves to-day. To be sure, he was admittedly, pre-eminent as a compiler—an odd pre-eminence by the way for an addle-pate—but he was no less pre-eminent in everything else that he attempted; and it seems a deplorable dissipation of the genius of a great original painter to have its most precious hours employed in making reduced and refined copies for the use of schools of coarse and confused

engravings. As, however, even for compilations and even from the philanthropic Newbery his remuneration, as the above receipt shows, was not always princely, Goldsmith felt compelled to look elsewhere for relief of his necessities; and was only too glad to act upon the suggestion of the kindly Sir Joshua that he should resume practice as a physician with the advantage of the advertisement of *The Traveller*.

The first requisite—the first at least in Goldsmith's eyes—for success as a physician was an imposing appearance, and he ordered accordingly three gorgeous suits, at the expense no doubt of his tailor, and also at the expense of his own comfort. He had to live up to his clothes, and was, as he complained dismally to his friend, Cooke, because of their gorgeousness, "shut out of several places where I used to play the fool very agreeably." "If the splendour of the handsome roquelaire, of the purple silk small-clothes, the sword, the gold-headed cane and the full-dress doctor's wig was too imposing for his humbler friends, they did not impose sufficiently upon his patients. For, if the first qualification for the successful practice of physic is appearance, the second, according to Goldsmith himself, is assurance. In his *Life of Beau Nash*, he says: "The business of love somewhat resembles the business of physic; no matter for qualifications; he that makes vigorous pretensions to either is surest of success." Here Goldsmith failed. He was always self-distrustful, while he might well be self-distrustful of his medical skill. At last he gave up the unpromising experiment in disgust when a lady patient insulted him by preferring to his opinion that of a common apothecary! Everyone—except

its victim—enjoyed Beauclerk’s witty reply to Goldsmith’s resolution of disgust:—“I shall give up altogether prescribing for my friends.” “Do, do, doctor ; prescribe only for your enemies.”

Having failed once more and for the last time as a physician, Goldsmith turned an eager eye to the stage. In those days, as in ours, a successful play was the most immediately remunerative of all literary productions, but in those days also, as in ours, it was the most difficult of achievement. To begin with, it is naturally and incomparably easier to induce a publisher, than it is to induce a manager, to usher your work into the world. Both the risk and the cost of failure is far more formidable to a manager, who incurs crushing expense in submitting a new piece to the momentary judgment of a capricious audience. It must succeed at once or not at all. It cannot be kept on the boards, like a book on a counter, till the public taste may happen to veer round to it.

A play, then,—unless indeed its other merits be overpowering—must to succeed be as opportune almost as a newspaper, must hit the taste of the town while on the wing:—

“Choose a firm cloud before it fall, and in it
Catch, ere she change, the Cynthia of this minute.”

Here was Goldsmith’s chief difficulty. He disdained and declined to be opportune. Nothing would induce him to write down to the level of the silly sentimentalism then in vogue. Taking his countryman, Farquhar, as his model, he resolved to be healthily even robustly natural ; whereas daylight and fresh air were shut out from the current plays.

Again, Goldsmith would no more stoop to fit his characters to the special capacities of the actors than he would stoop to fit his play to the special tastes of the audience. It was too much then, as it is still, the practice for a dramatist to take the exact measure of the popular actors of the moment, as a tailor takes the exact measure of his customer, and to cut out the characters accordingly. Goldsmith, however, kept an unwavering eye on nature alone.

Lastly, Goldsmith had Garrick to deal with, and Garrick had at once an old grudge and a new prejudice against the poet. He had an old grudge against the author of *The Enquiry*, who wrote so disdainfully of the stage, and he had a new prejudice against a member of "The Club" whom his fellow-members held so lightly. "The partiality of his friends, sir, was always *against* Goldsmith. It was with difficulty we could give him a hearing," to quote again, what is well worth remembering, Johnson's testimony to the character of "The Club" feeling and bearing towards the poet.

Indeed Goldsmith, foreboding nothing but difficulty and disagreeability with Garrick, had written *The Good-Natured Man* for the other house—Covent Garden—but, when the death of Rich threw the affairs of this theatre into confusion, the poet had to have desperate recourse to Garrick. He was, in fact, desperate through money difficulties, from which nothing but the success of his comedy could extricate him. As there was nothing now for it, therefore, but a recourse to Garrick, Sir Joshua, with his usual goodness, intervened to patch up the old quarrel between poet and manager. But even from the first the reconciliation was ill-joined. Garrick

would treat the negotiation as a suit; Goldsmith as a bargain, which it unquestionably was. No dramatist could expect any manager, and most certainly Goldsmith could not expect Garrick, to accept a play on other merits than its own, and Goldsmith, therefore, was justified in assuming that the acceptance of his comedy was no compliment to himself. Even Garrick's biographer, Tom Davies, makes this candid admission:—"Mr Garrick, who had so long been treated with the complimentary language paid to a successful patentee and admired actor, expected that the writer would esteem the patronage of his play a favour. Goldsmith rejected all ideas of kindness in a bargain that was intended to be of mutual advantage to both parties, and in this he was certainly justifiable. Mr Garrick could reasonably expect no thanks for the acting of a new play, which he would have rejected if he had not been convinced it would have amply rewarded his pains and expense. I believe the manager was willing to accept the play, but he wished to be courted to it; and the Doctor was not disposed to purchase his friendship by the resignation of his sincerity."

This is not the first time, nor is it the last, that Goldsmith, who has been represented so persistently as the weakest of men, maintained a manly front of self-respect, which hardly any other author of the day in his desperate circumstances would have had the fortitude to show. He paid for it, of course, and bitterly. Garrick accepted the piece and then proceeded to starve the author to submission by postponement after postponement. Goldsmith's straits were so extreme that he had at last to apply

to Garrick for an advance, which these postponements rendered rather a debt than a loan. This advance was made by Garrick with an alacrity, which is explained by his immediate demand for its equivalent in "a pound of flesh cut from nearest the heart"—or; in other words, by his demand for the mutilation of the comedy by the excision of its second character in importance and merit. Garrick believed that the play would be strengthened by the elimination of Lofty, whose character, he contended, distracted attention from the contrast it should have illustrated and emphasised—the contrast between Honeywood and Croaker. Goldsmith in his fight for the retention of Lofty was, as everyone now admits, in the right, just as he was in the right afterwards in his struggle for the retention of the bailiffs to whom the audience originally objected; but Garrick was obdurate.

When, finally, Garrick proposed to leave the point in dispute to the arbitration of his own reader of plays, the laureate, Whitehead, Goldsmith lost all patience and the quarrel waxed so hot that both Burke and Reynolds had to intervene to compose it. It was still smouldering, however, when the accession of Colman to the management of Covent Garden, gave Goldsmith the chance of having the play accepted by the house for which it was originally written. Accordingly he forthwith submitted it to Colman, who promptly accepted it.

But Goldsmith had still to reckon with Garrick, and a doubly envenomed Garrick. Deeper even than his grudge against Goldsmith, was Garrick's grudge against the new manager of Covent Garden, who had not only deserted him, but had carried off

into the opposite camp some of his best actors. Garrick, looking about for the most powerful weapon for the ruin of both Colman and Goldsmith, found it in a play which fell in with the current finical taste as strongly as *The Good-Natured Man* ran counter to it—Kelly’s *False Delicacy*. Though *False Delicacy* belonged to a school which Garrick had heretofore done what he could, as dramatist and manager, to discountenance, and though it was an incredibly silly specimen of that silly school, it was the best stick to the Drury Lane manager’s hand to beat two dogs with, and he now threw all his strength into securing its success. He wrote for it a prologue and epilogue, touched up its best character, persuaded Mrs Dancer (who hated Kelly, not without reason) to play the only other character with any merit ; and finally, “by finessing and trick,” he induced Colman to keep back *The Good-Natured Man* until *False Delicacy* had still more deeply prejudiced against it the taste of the town.

False Delicacy, then, was first in the field, and, as it reflected the sentiment of the hour, it was the success of the hour ; for the public, like a vain beauty, would rather see its own reflection in the mirror held up to it than the finest reflection of Nature itself. The admirable acting of the play might account for its success on the boards ; but it had, besides, a literary success, testified by the sale within a few weeks of ten thousand copies, which to-day seems unaccountable, and, indeed, seemed unaccountable even in that day after the first furore had subsided.

Thus *False Delicacy* did the utmost that could be expected from it ; but it failed to do the utmost Garrick expected from it. It could not so sophisticate

the taste of the town as to spoil altogether its relish for the nature and robust humour of *The Good-Natured Man*.

What, however, had most perhaps to do with the success, and also with the failure—so far as it was a failure—of *The Good-Natured Man* was the acting. Powell perfunctorily walked through the part of Honeywood. As the star of the hour he could afford to keep his word when, at the rehearsals, he said that he could make nothing of the part—and he kept it. On the other hand, the Croaker of Shuter and the Lofty of Woodward saved the piece from the damnation which the lethargy of Powell and the robust humour of the bailiffs' scene had nearly incurred. For the bailiffs' scene, perhaps the best in the comedy, was hissed by the superfine vulgarians of the pit, and had to be omitted after the first night. On the other hand, the incendiary scene, where the fooling is far from admirable, as unexpectedly buoyed up the sinking piece. What chiefly saved the play, however, was the admirable acting of Shuter, which brought down the house in scenes that do not, in reading, seem uproariously humorous. In the last scene of the fourth act especially Shuter's acting broke down the superfine and supercilious affectation of the sentimentalists, set the whole house in a roar and saved the play.

Meanwhile, Goldsmith's misery was exquisite. In spite of the discouragement of Colman, whose foreboding of failure had been even more positive and gloomy than Garrick's, Goldsmith had himself the utmost confidence in his appeal to humour and nature, and now he saw the scenes upon which he had relied most—and with most reason—either

falling flat or absolutely hissed. That he should have been crushed by his disappointment, or rather that he should show even to his dearest friend how crushed he was, has ever since excited the somewhat contemptuous pity even of his biographers. No doubt Goldsmith did break down utterly in the reaction after months of over-work and over-worry, during which his flayed nerves had been played upon mercilessly by both Garrick and Colman. Having at the fall of the curtain made Shuter the generous acknowledgment “that he had exceeded his own ideas of the character of Croaker, and by the comic richness of the colouring had made it almost as new to him as to the audience,” he hurried off with a heavy heart to the Club meeting. Here, though he could not eat a single morsel, he rattled away more noisily than usual to hide his chagrin, and even sang his great song about “An Old Woman tossed in a blanket seventeen times as high as the Moon.” “All this while,” he confessed afterwards to Percy in Johnson’s presence, “I was suffering horrid tortures, and verily believe that if I had put a bit into my mouth it would have strangled me on the spot, I was so excessively ill. But I made more noise than usual to cover all that, and so they never perceived my not eating, nor, I believe, at all imaged to themselves the anguish of my heart. But when all were gone, except Johnson here, I burst out a-crying, and even swore by —— that I would never write again!”

Such a breakdown after the wearing worry of months, after his great disappointment and after the struggle to hide it, was neither unnatural nor unmanly. Johnson himself, the manliest of men, had his own weak hour when Thrale had to place his hand before

his mouth to silence the terrible outpourings of his morbid conscience. Johnson, it is true, did not, like Goldsmith, recall and repeat to a third person this confession after he had recovered the depression which occasioned it; but this third person, it should be remembered, was a yet older friend of Goldsmith's, Percy. Goldsmith, in repeating the confession to Percy, had little idea that Johnson would now consider himself free to repeat it to Mrs Thrale of all people, and to repeat it, even with some scorn, for the poet's weakness. "No man," he said to Mrs Thrale, in justification of his ridicule of this break-down of Goldsmith's, "no man should be expected to sympathise with the sorrows of vanity." It might be thought that Johnson, who, at least, understood the pleasures of vanity—for no man of his day was more amenable to flattery—might have sympathised with its sorrows. Johnson's scorn of Goldsmith's sensitiveness, in fact, was about as reasonable as the scorn of a mediæval knight, clad in complete steel, for the cowardice of a footman without defensive armour. Take, for example, the epithet in Johnson's Prologue to *The Good-Natured Man*, to which Goldsmith objected. By the way, this ponderous and lugubrious prologue to a farcical comedy opens incongruously thus:—

"Pressed by the load of life the weary mind
Surveys the general toil of human kind;
With cool submission joins the labouring train,
And social sorrow loses half its pain."

As aptly might a sepulchre "ope its ponderous and marble jaws" to admit you into a ballroom. Then followed in the original the couplet:—

"Our little bard without complaint may share
This bustling season's epidemic care."

"Don't call me 'Our *little* bard,'" objected Goldsmith, and the objection has been laughed at ever since as ludicrously characteristic of the poet. "Malone," says Mr Forster, "used to refer to this eagerly-desired omission as one of the most characteristic traits he knew of Goldsmith." And Mr Forster is as much amused by the characteristic objection as Malone. Now I should just like to ask would Malone himself, if he had been a writer, instead of a critic, of plays, have been complimented by being taken in this way by the hand, led before the footlights and introduced for the first time to an audience as a mannikin bard? The epithet, you say, would not have suited Malone as it did Goldsmith. But suppose it *did* suit Malone, or suppose, to come nearer the case of Goldsmith, it was thought by all Malone's condescending or contemptuous friends to suit him, would he have liked it the better? Would not the "galled jade wince" more than one whose "withers were unwrung"? The truth is, it is not Goldsmith's objection to the epithet "little" which is characteristic, but Malone's and Forster's ridicule of that objection. To those of Goldsmith's contemporaries who took their cue from "The Club," and to those who have since taken their cue from Boswell, the objection of Tom Thumb to be introduced to any company upon the palm of the giant's hand seemed ridiculous; but what is really ridiculous is this contemptuous or condescending patronage of the author of *The Traveller*, of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and of *The Good-Natured Man* itself.

For with all its faults *The Good-Natured Man*, thus condescendingly patronised, takes its indisputable

place beside the poem and the novel as the best thing of its kind hitherto done in that generation. It is not, no more than *The Vicar of Wakefield* or *She Stoops to Conquer*, an artistic or coherent work. Its situations are happy thoughts, but after-thoughts, less integral parts of a well-composed picture than a succession of lively lantern slides. But the humour of the comedy is rich, spontaneous and irresistible ; while no one, I think, will question Mrs Inchibald's criticism of its leading characters :—

“The characters of Croaker, of Honeywood and of Lofty, each deserves the highest praise which fictitious characters can receive—in fiction they are perfectly original, yet are seen every day in real life.”

CHAPTER XVI

CHILDISH EXTRAVAGANCES

WHEN Goldsmith was usher at the Peckham Academy, Mrs Milner, the wife of the principal, said to him, "You had better, Mr Goldsmith, let me take care of your money as I do for some of the young gentlemen." "In truth, madam, there is equal need," replied Goldsmith. Mrs Milner had noted that the usher's slender salary was dissipated as soon as received in treats to the boys. It was so all his life through. If anyone ever knew what the odd expression "a cool hundred" meant, it was certainly not Goldsmith, whose hundreds were always hot enough to burn an immediate hole in his pocket. *The Good-Natured Man* was played for ten consecutive nights with a success which brought the author—for his three nights' benefit—close on £400, while his profit upon the publication of the comedy amounted to £100 more. Four-fifths of this sum he invested at once in the purchase of chambers in Brick Court, Middle Temple, which he furnished sumptuously for the sumptuous entertainment of his friends. This sumptuous entertainment of friends—the most thankless of all forms of beneficence—helped to involve him in drudgery and in debts which shortened his life. Let me say a word, first, about the drudgery and next about the debts. He had to write, as he said to Cradock, a volume every month

of his life, and a volume a month of the kind of work the most distasteful to an original genius—compilation. Nothing, let me say, shows a clear head more conclusively than lucid condensation—packing the portmanteau so as to put the most in the least space and the best order. Yet, though Goldsmith wrote a volume a month of this distasteful condensation, and had to write, therefore, almost as quickly as he could put pen to paper, his work was crystal clear. Hear Johnson upon Goldsmith's pot-boiling condensations of history:—"Whether, indeed, we take Goldsmith as a poet, as a comic writer or as an historian, he stands in the first class." "An historian!" exclaims Boswell, naturally enough. "An historian! My dear sir, you surely will not rank Goldsmith's compilations of Roman History with the works of other historians of this age?" This Johnson proceeds to do, no doubt making for Goldsmith an extravagant claim in some respects, but not in the respects of lucidity, charm and compactness. "Besides, sir," Johnson adds, "it is the great excellence of a writer to put into his book as much as his book will hold. Goldsmith has done this in his history. . . . Goldsmith tells you shortly all you want to know; Robertson detains you a great deal too long. No man will read Robertson's cumbrous detail a second time; but Goldsmith's plain narrative will please again and again. . . . Goldsmith's abridgment is better than that of Lucius Florus or Eutropius; and, I will venture to say that, if you compare him with Vertot in the same places of Roman History you will find that he excels Vertot. Sir, he has the art of compiling, and of saying everything he has to say in a pleasing manner. He is

now writing a Natural History, and will make it as entertaining as a Persian tale."

It must be remembered here that Goldsmith's historical compilations, unlike the histories with which they were compared by Johnson—Lyttleton's, or Robertson's, or Dalrymple's—were neither his specialty nor his life-work. On the contrary, they were incidental tasks for which he had no particular fitness, fancy or taste, tasks not of his own setting, but of a bookseller's, undertaken not of choice, but of necessity. In one word, they were perfunctory drudgery, and ought, therefore, to bear all the marks of perfunctory drudgery—slovenliness, wordiness and obscurity. Being, however, perfunctory drudgery by Goldsmith they bore all the marks of all his work—clearness, compactness and gracefulness. As nothing needs a clearer head than condensed compilation, it is, then, absurd to suppose that Goldsmith's brain was

"Like a fountain troubled—
Muddy, ill-seeming, thick,"

and needing time to run itself clear. A man with a slow-working and confused brain could not have done these compilations in the short time allowed him by the booksellers nor in the clear, attractive style which won such praise from Johnson. If he did such work so well it was not because he liked it, but because he could not help doing well whatever he attempted. He took to compilation only because he was kept ever needy by his extravagance and because the money it brought him in was out of all proportion to the trouble it cost him. For the two volumes of his *History of Rome* Tom Davies paid him 250 guineas; while he received from the same bookseller

£100 a volume for four volumes of a *History of England*. Griffin, again, engaged to give him 100 guineas a volume for eight volumes of a *Natural History*. It will be seen then that now and henceforth Goldsmith has himself only to blame for his ever-increasing difficulties. A man whose expenditure keeps always in geometric ratio to his income inevitably becomes poorer in proportion to the increase of his gains. When Goldsmith's biographers regretfully contrast the sums paid him for his histories with the £4500 paid to Robertson for his *Charles the Fifth*, they regret it because they conclude that payments upon this sumptuous scale would have lightened the poet's difficulties. As a matter of fact they would have multiplied them, since he always proportioned his expenditure to his income as the tyre of a wheel is proportioned to its nave.

Lady Mary Wortley Montague says of Steele and Fielding, "Both agreed in wanting money, and would have wanted it were their hereditary lands as extensive as their imaginations"; and as both were, like Goldsmith, sanguine men, perhaps the extensiveness of their imaginations had much to do with the extravagance of their expenditure. At any rate, when Goldsmith got a lump sum he must muddle it away on anyone—except his creditors. He paid them just enough to secure from them more credit, on the principle of pouring a pint of water down a pump which has run dry to wet and swell the sucker and thereby induce it to yield an ample supply.

On the other hand, it must be remembered that it was his heart which chiefly impoverished him, and which would have impoverished him had he been rich as Rothschild. "I have heard," writes North-

cote in his *Life of Reynolds*, "I have heard Sir Joshua remark of Goldsmith that in times of his greatest distress he was often obliged to supplicate a friend for the loan of ten pounds for his immediate relief; yet if by accident a distressed petitioner told him a piteous tale, he, without any thought of his own poverty, would, with an air of generosity, freely bestow on the person who solicited for it the very loan he had himself but just before obtained." The fact is, nothing could wear out either Goldsmith's uncalculating charity or his incorrigible credulity. That rascal, Pilkington, as we have seen, who had taken him in already a hundred times, could take him in for the hundred and first with his preposterous tale of the Duchess and the white mice. In his charity Goldsmith forgot injuries too as quickly as he forgot rogueries. There was no man he disliked more and with more reason, than the overbearing and venomous Baretti, who never missed an opportunity of insulting him; yet, says Davies, "When this unhappy Italian was charged with murder, and sent by Sir John Fielding to Newgate, Goldsmith opened his purse and would have given him every shilling it contained; he, at the same time, insisted upon going in the coach with him to the place of his confinement."

It might be inferred—it has been inferred—from such expressions as Northcote's "with an air of generosity," that Goldsmith's charity was as showy as his dress and that the ostentation of each was due alike to vanity. As a matter of fact, however, the channel of his charity ran mostly underground. Scorned outcasts, the moral sewage of a great city, shovelled out of sight as loathsome, were far costlier to him than his finer friends. "I believe," writes

Northcote, "Reynolds to have been the confidant of some at least of Goldsmith's sorrowful cases and to have helped to relieve them. So at least I explain the first entry on the fly-leaf of the pocket-book for 1771 which runs :—'Goldsmith's girl : Mrs Quarrington ; inquire for Mrs Jones at Mrs Sneyd's, Tibbald's Row, Red Lion Street. Mrs Hartley, Little James Street, Haymarket, at Mrs Kelly's.' These," adds Northcote, "are all models. One of Goldsmith's outcast protégées had, I imagine, been employed as a model on his recommendation."

"He had been known," says Percy, "to quit his bed at midnight in order to procure shelter and relief for some destitute creature left to die in the streets." "He had," says Cooke, "two or three authors, several widows and poor housekeepers always on his list, and if his purse was empty he emptied his wardrobe or his breakfast-table for their relief. 'Now let me suppose,' he would say with a happy smile, 'that I have eaten a much heartier breakfast than usual and I'm nothing out of pocket.'" His last guinea, testifies Cooke, was the only limit of his humanity.

At Goldsmith's death the public funeral proposed in his honour was denied him because he died in debt ; but his own debtors, the outcasts in tears who thronged his staircase, did him more honour than these snobbish celebrities would have done him by bearing his pall to Westminster Abbey.

Let me say a word now of that other extravagance of Goldsmith's, which also has been ascribed to a vain ostentation—his extravagance in dress. Goldsmith's extravagance in dress proceeded not from assurance but from diffidence ; not from conceit but from humility. He was always, as his letters to his in-

timates show, miserably conscious of his personal defects. Being at once ugly and conscious of his ugliness, he was through his exquisite sensitiveness the most vulnerable to ridicule, and, in his impressionable years, the most mercilessly ridiculed of human beings. This ridicule, which met him at every turn and stage of his early life—at home, at school, at college—left upon his character marks as indelible and as disfiguring as the marks left on his face by the small-pox. Hence that nervous eagerness to please and to shine which so often defeated itself in uncongenial or contentious society; and hence, too, the endeavour, also self-defeated, to gild his personal defects with fine clothes. To say that these fine clothes had the reverse effect—the effect of emphasizing the plainness they were designed to disguise—is only to say that Goldsmith was like most self-conscious plain folk; since you seldom see such startling costumes or colours as are worn by those ladies who are, and who feel that they are, already too conspicuously plain.

In truth, the key to Goldsmith's extravagances, whether of dress or of living, is the key also to almost all that he was loved and laughed at for—his childlikeness. "In wit a man, simplicity a child." Here he is established in these Middle Temple Chambers, disturbing by his childlike frolics the learned Blackstone in the rooms beneath, distracting him in his composition of the fourth volume of his *Commentaries*. Blackstone complained bitterly and with reason of the riotous rows above his head of the poet's children's parties, where he played with them blind-man's-buff, forfeits, etc. etc., sang roystering Irish songs for them, or would wear, to amuse them, the front of his wig behind.

This wig, says Macklin, the actor, Goldsmith threw up to the ceiling as he danced at a party in his house, crying, "Men were never so much like men as when they looked like boys." "Come now, let us play the fool a little!" was his usual preface to a romp, and his friends took him at his word and played the fool with him. At Barton, the residence of Little Comedy, who had become Mrs Bunbury, she and her sister, Mrs Gwyn, the Jessamy Bride, and their guests played all sorts of schoolboy tricks upon Goldsmith, especially at the cost of his grand clothes, smearing his gorgeous coat with paint, tearing his fine ruffles, ruining his imposing wig, but never succeeding in ruffling his temper. Most of all he was at home with children, enjoying nothing so much as a romp with them; and I do not know that I can close this chapter better than by quoting the following story from Colman's *Random Records* as the most characteristic perhaps of all the stories told of this poet whose "child's heart within the man's" was ever in evidence.

"I remember," says George Colman in these *Random Records*, "when I was a child of five Goldsmith taking me on his knee to amuse me, when I rewarded him with a spiteful blow given with all my force in his face. My father for punishment locked me up in a dark room, where I howled and kicked the door—till it opened, and Goldsmith entered, smiling, with a candle, which showed the mark of my spiteful blow still in his face. Setting the candle down, he took me in his arms and kissed and soothed and fondled me while I sulked and sobbed. When at last the sobs ceased Goldsmith seized the propitious moment; he went down on all fours, and placing three hats, which happened to be in the room, upon the carpet, and

putting a shilling under each, he began to conjure all three under a single hat to my utter amazement. Henceforth, whenever Goldsmith called I rushed to him for a romp and we became the merriest and most loving play-fellows."

That was Goldsmith's "Retaliation," recalling the spirit of the poem in which he dealt so gently with men to whom he owed nothing but blows.

CHAPTER XVII

"THE DESERTED VILLAGE"

THE title of "Inspired Idiot" was given to Goldsmith in right of two poems which had less claim to the spontaneity of inspiration than any perhaps of equal length that ever were composed. *The Traveller* was eight years in gestation, *The Deserted Village* two. So, at least, all Goldsmith's biographers assure us; but for myself I cannot reconcile the time they assign to the composition of *The Traveller* with the anecdote they give of Reynolds' surprise visit to the author when he was at work upon the poem. Reynolds, when his knock at Goldsmith's door was unanswered, entered the room unbidden, to find the poet at his desk, but absorbed in teaching a little dog to sit up with one hand, while the other held the pen wherewith he had just written this couplet:—

"By sports like these are all their cares beguiled;
The sports of children satisfy the child."

Sir Joshua, glancing over his shoulder, read the couplet in ink still wet, and saw its happy illustration in the game Goldsmith was playing with his dog. But this visit took place in the early part of 1764, the couplet occurs about a third of the way through the poem, which was published at the close of the year. As the couplet could not have been an inter-

polation, since it follows duly upon lines already written, it would appear to imply that the other two-thirds of *The Traveller* must have been written before the close of the year.

On the other hand, the dedication of *The Traveller* to his brother leaves no doubt that part of it was written eight years before its publication :—

"The friendship between us can acquire no new force from the ceremonies of a Dedication ; but, as a part of this poem was formerly written to you from Switzerland, the whole can now with propriety be only inscribed to you."

Though, however, there were eight years between the conception and the publication of *The Traveller*, its composition probably took little longer actual time than that of *The Deserted Village*. Indeed, the poet's pot-boiling drudgery—at the rate of a volume a month—left him little time for original work. But all the time and trouble he could spare he gave to it. The pains Goldsmith took with these poems was extreme compared with the careless facility of his compilations and of his contributions to the press. Cooke, who called upon Goldsmith the day after he had begun *The Deserted Village*, thus describes and comments upon the elaborate pains taken with its composition. The Doctor, he says, wrote poetry very slowly, "not from tardiness of fancy, but from the time he took in pointing the sentiment and polishing the versification." He wrote first a prose sketch of the idea he had conceived, which he versified slowly, and these verses he revised and re-revised till he had perfected them to his ear and taste. On the morning of Cooke's visit, for

example, he had written thus ten lines—from the fifth to the fifteenth — and congratulated himself upon having done so well:—"Come, let me tell you, this is no bad morning's work. And, now, my dear boy, if you are no better engaged, I should be glad to enjoy a Shoemaker's Holiday with you."

Here is the programme of a Shoemaker's Holiday:—First, a breakfast with a few friends in Goldsmith's Chambers at ten; then, a walk through the fields to Highbury Barn, where they dined at one; then tea at six in White Conduit House, and finally supper at the Grecian, or at the Temple Exchange Coffee-house, or at the Globe in Fleet Street. "The whole expenses of the day's *fête* never exceeded a crown, and oftener were from three - and - sixpence to four shillings; for which the party obtained good air and exercise, good living, the example of simple manners and good conversation."

Goldsmith, when in spirits, was the very life and soul of the party, as he was of all his clubs—and many a club had he—always excepting the unsociable Gerrard Street debating society. Even when the members of "The Club" met, not on neutral ground in Gerrard Street, but as the guests of Sir Joshua, they made a cock-pit of his dining-room, as Lawyer Dunning complained; and when a lawyer complains of contentiousness, he must indeed find himself in a very cave of Æolus. But in such purely sociable parties as Cooke describes, Goldsmith, being self-possessed and self-assured, was always delightful, and often brilliant, company. Being himself the most natural of men, he was always happiest in the

society of the unaffected, even of the unsophisticated —of those who had no name to lose and no scorn to fear by letting themselves go. As he expresses it in the poem I have now come to, *The Deserted Village* :—

“To me more dear, congenial to my heart,
One native charm than all the gloss of art :
Spontaneous joys where Nature has its play,
The soul adopts and owns their first-born sway ;
Lightly they frolic o’er the vacant mind,
Unenvied, unmolested, unconfined.”

The very naturalness of the poor endeared them to Goldsmith. How dear they were to him in other ways and for other reasons his essays testify ; but nowhere is his profound sympathy with them expressed with such pathetic power as in *The Deserted Village*. The peasantry for whom he pleads there, are not English or Irish, but English *and* Irish, though Auburn, whether in prosperity or desolation, is Lissoy and nowhere else. It is not a shallow and sentimental patriotism which makes me urge an Irish claim to Auburn, but impatience of the stupidity that disputes it. I wonder in what sprightly English village did Goldsmith see the jocund Hodge at such play as he describes :—

“How often have I blessed the coming day,
When toil remitting lent its turn to play,
And all the village train, from labour free,
Led up their sports beneath the spreading tree.
While many a pastime circled in the shade,
The young contending, while the old surveyed ;
And many a gambol frolicked o’er the ground,
And sleights of art and feats of strength went round ;

And still, as each repeated pleasure tired,
Succeeding sports the mirthful band inspired.
The dancing pair that simply sought renown
By holding out to tire each other down.
The swain, mistrustless of his smutted face,
While secret laughter titter'd round the place ;
The bashful virgin's side-long looks of love ;
The matron's glance that would those looks reprove."

Such scenes he had seen on every Sunday and holiday in Ireland as in his day they were general there ; but where in England were they to be seen ? While, as I have said already, no one disputes the identity of the village preacher and of the village schoolmaster with Charles Goldsmith and Thomas Byrne. To be sure I saw it urged the other day in a book edited by Mr Andrew Lang—*Poets' Country*—that Auburn could not have been Lissoy, because the nightingale is mentioned in the poem—

"And filled each pause the nightingale had made,"

while everyone knows that the nightingale never visits Ireland ! I recalled as I read Johnson's subtle criticism of these lines in *Lycidas*,

"We drove afield, and both together heard
What time the grey fly winds her sultry horn,
Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night."

"What image of tenderness," exclaims Johnson, "can be excited by these lines ? We know that they never drove afield and that they had no flocks to batten." As the critic in *Poets' Country* admits the village in decay to be Irish, the nightingale must have migrated with its emigrants to be replaced by "the hollow-sounding bittern."

As a matter of fact, however, the depopulated Auburn, though more Irish than English, was English also according to Goldsmith's own statement. "I remember this depopulation in my own country and have seen it in this." And here let me say that every English critic and biographer of Goldsmith, from Macaulay and Mr Forster down, laugh at the philosophy and at the political economy of the poem as self-evidently absurd. Goldsmith might, indeed, as a poet be "inspired"; as a thinker he was an "idiot." It is odd then that every reform which he suggested has been or is being carried out; that the revolutions he predicted took place; and that commerce and manufactures *have* both directly and indirectly depopulated the villages of England. Goldsmith saw the mere beginning of the movement, but he foresaw its end. Can anyone who knows what the country districts of England were and what they are to-day, dispute either the change or the evil of the change?

"Ill fares the land to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay :
Princes and lords may flourish and may fade ;
A breath can make them, as a breath has made ;
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroyed, can never be supplied.
A time there was, ere England's griefs began,
When every rood of ground maintained its man ;
For him light labour spread her wholesome store,
Just gave what life required, but gave no more ;
His best companions, innocence and health ;
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth."

Is not this—when all due allowance has been made for the Utopian exaggeration of poetry—substantially true? No one now will deny that wholesome English

country growths are drained into the towns to rot there as refuse.

“Where, then, ah ! where shall poverty reside,
 To 'scape the pressure of contiguous pride ?
 If to some common's fenceless limits stray'd
 He drives his flock to pick the scanty blade,
 These fenceless fields the sons of wealth divide,
 And e'en the bare-worn common is denied.
 If to the city sped—what waits him there ?
 To see profusion that he must not share ;
 To see ten thousand baneful arts combined
 To pamper luxury and thin mankind ;
 To see those joys the sons of pleasure know
 Extorted from his fellow-creature's woe.
 Here, while the courtier glitters in brocade,
 There, the pale artist plies his sickly trade ;
 Here, where the proud their long-drawn pomp display,
 There, the black gibbet glooms beside the way.
 The dome where pleasure holds her midnight reign,
 Here, richly decked, admits the gorgeous train :
 Tumultuous grandeur crowds the blazing square,
 The rattling chariots clash, the torches glare.
 Sure scenes like these no troubles ere annoy !
 Sure these denote one universal joy !
 Are these thy serious thoughts ? Ah, turn thine
 eyes
 Where the poor houseless, shivering female lies.
 She once perhaps in village plenty blest,
 Has wept at tales of innocence distress ;
 Her modest looks the cottage might adorn,
 Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn
 Now, lost to all, her friends, her virtue fled
 Near her betrayer's door, she lays her head ;
 And pinched with cold, and shrinking from the shower,
 With heavy heart deplores that luckless hour,
 When idly first, ambitious of the town,
 She left her wheel and robes of country brown.”

Trade which drafts the villages into the towns,
 is uncertain and is demoralising in its uncertainty ;

since precarious employment destroys habits of industry and creates habits of dissipation, with the result that the poor become poorer not in means only but also in morals. That the rich at the same time become richer is the reverse of a counter-balance, since their wealth, being mostly, so to say, in foreign bottoms, deflects our policy abroad; while at home its selfishness and invidiousness exacerbate the dangerous discontent of the destitute. These consequences of commerce under our eyes to-day suggest that the philosophy of *The Deserted Village* may not, after all, be so shallow as the scorn of Macaulay and the rest denotes it; while its moral—that the seeming strength of a purely commercial country is but dropsical—may have something also to be said for it. Surely a country which is self-supporting, self-contained and self-dependent, is stronger at once for offence and for defence, less invertebrate and less vulnerable, than a country which commerce has unnerved with responsibilities, distracted with dependencies, and left, like a part-armoured ironclad, defenceless through two-thirds of her unwieldy length, and left also at the mercy for its food supply of any power that may have temporary command of the sea? Of course there is much to be said also on the other side, and Goldsmith knew it, as those who study his essays can see; but this does not make his lament of the evils of the side to which England, as a commercial country, leaned, less true or less wise. Facts, I think are with him rather than with his critics, when he deplores the existence, the increase, and the demoralisation of emigration, migration, luxury, and of the trust in the treacherous strength of commerce. The moral of the poem, as expressed in

the closing lines—of which the four last are by Johnson—seems to me to be written in the history of all commercial countries :—

“Aid slighted truth with thy persuasive strain ;
Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain ;
Teach him that states of native strength possessed,
Though very poor, may still be very blest ;
That trade’s proud empire hastes to swift decay,
As ocean sweeps the laboured mole away ;
While self-dependent power can time defy,
As rocks resist the billows and the sky.”

I hope I may be forgiven for dragging in here, in support of “the shallow philosophy” of Goldsmith, an extract from a speech of the profoundest of practical philosophers. In a speech delivered in the House of Commons on 17th February 1606-7, Bacon said :—

“Such I take to be the constitution of this kingdom if, indeed, we shall refer our counsels to greatness and power and not quench them too much with the consideration of utility and wealth. For, Mr Speaker, was it not, think you, a true answer that Solon of Greece made to the rich King Cræsus of Lydia, when he showed unto him a great quantity of gold that he had gathered together in ostentation of his greatness and might? But Solon said to him, contrary to his expectation :—‘Why, sir, if another come that hath better iron than you, he will be lord of all your gold.’ Neither is the opinion of Machiavel to be despised, who scorneth that proverb of State—taken first from a speech of Mucianus—that ‘monies are the sinews of war.’ Saith Machiavel, ‘There are no true sinews of war but the very sinews of the arms of valiant men,

Nay more, Mr Speaker: whosoever shall look into the seminaries and beginnings of the monarchies of the world, he shall find them founded on poverty. . . . And therefore, if I shall speak unto you mine own heart, methinks we should a little disdain that the nation of Spain, which, however of late it hath grown to rule, yet of ancient time served many ages, first under Carthage, then under Rome, after under Saracens, Goths and others, should of late years take unto themselves that spirit as to dream of a monarchy in the West, according to that device, *Video solem orientem in occidente*, only because they have ravished from some wild and unarmed people mines and store of gold; and, on the other side, that this island of Britain, seated and manned as it is and that hath, I make no question, the best iron in the world—that is the best soldiers in the world—shall think of nothing but reckonings and audits, and *meum* and *tuum*, and I cannot tell what."

The sudden collapse as of a burst balloon of this bloated kingdom of Spain would alone justify Goldsmith's doubt of the endurance of any empire purely commercial in its origin, its aim, its ideas and ideals.

Of the poetry of *The Deserted Village* I need say little, for about that there is no controversy. Its mellow and, so to say, moonlit loveliness has, I think, upon all readers the sweet and sad effect of the plaintive remembrance of happy days long dead. It has all the artlessness of consummate art; for never was a poem less inspired in the popular sense of the word. Every line of it was cut with lapidary care; for except Gray, no one was so fastidiously painstaking with his poetry as Goldsmith. Hence he shares with Gray the distinction that the classic passages of his

poems are as pathetically familiar to every ear as the tune of "Home Sweet Home" or of "Auld Lang Syne." It was natural that the fastidious Gray himself should have been amongst the earliest and most enthusiastic admirers of the poem. He listened to Nicholls, as he read it out to him, with rapt attention and exclaimed at the close, "This man is a poet!"

A greater poet and finer critic than Gray — the greatest poet and critic of that century—Goethe, hastened to pay the tribute of translation to *The Deserted Village*. In his autobiography Goethe says :—"A little poem which we passionately received into our circle allowed us from henceforward to think of nothing else. Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* necessarily delighted everyone at that grade of cultivation, in that sphere of thought. Not a living and active, but a vanished existence was described—all that one so readily looked upon, that one loved, prized, sought passionately in the present to take part in it with the cheerfulness of youth. . . . Here, again, we found an honest Wakefield in his well-known circle, yet no longer living in his bodily form, but as a shadow recalled by the soft mournful tones of the elegiac poet. The very thought of this picture is one of the happiest possible, when once the design is formed to evoke once more an innocent past with a graceful melancholy. And in this kindly endeavour, how well has the Englishman succeeded in every sense of the word. I shared the enthusiasm for this charming poem with Gotter, who was more felicitous than myself with the translation of it undertaken by us both; for I too had painfully tried to imitate in our language the delicate significance of the original, and thus had well agreed with single passages, but not with the whole."

Goldsmith knew nothing of these tributes of poets to his poem ; but he had at least the encouragement of immediate popular applause. Within four months from its publication on 20th May 1770, no less than five editions of the poem were exhausted.

CHAPTER XVIII

GOLDSMITH'S TEMPERAMENT

THE *DESERTED VILLAGE* established the reputation of Goldsmith as the first English poet of his day, and the first perhaps, of pastoral English poets of any day. Burke, writing to Shackleton some years after Goldsmith's death, exclaims: "What true and pretty pastoral images has Goldsmith in his *Deserted Village*! They beat all—Pope and Phillips and Spenser, too, in my opinion, that is in the pastoral, for I go no further."

But the home which inspired the poem, which would have enjoyed this praise most and whose own praise he would most have enjoyed, was now desolate. His brother Henry had died shortly after the poem was begun; his Uncle Contarine, whose kindness to him in the days of his shiftless vagabondage nothing could weary or wear out, had long lapsed into the imbecility of dotage, and his mother, though she lived for a month after the publication of the poem, had also survived herself and was dead to everything but a dull consciousness of her own existence. Yet no one needed more or craved more for the intimate and infinite sympathy of a home than Goldsmith. How often does he express this longing and how passionately! In the opening lines of *The Traveller*, he pictures his brother's happy home and turns from the picture with tears:—

"But me, not destined such delights to share,
My prime of life in wandering spent and care;

Impelled, with steps unceasing, to pursue
 Some fleeting good, that mocks me with the view ;
 That, like the circle bounding earth and skies,
 Allures from far, yet, as I follow, flies ;
 My fortune leads to traverse realms alone,
 And find no spot of all the world my own."

In *The Deserted Village* he pictures a home of his own he once had hoped to make, in which, like the hunted hare, he "might die at home at last." "O blest retirement" he exclaims—

"O blest retirement, friend to life's decline,
 Retreats from care that never must be mine!
 How blest is he who crowns in shades like these
 A youth of labour with an age of ease!
 Who quits a world where strong temptations try,
 And, since 'tis hard to combat, learns to fly!

Sinks to the grave with unperceived decay,
 While resignation gently slopes the way ;
 And, all his prospects brightening to the last,
 His heaven commences ere the world be past."

I am laying a little stress upon Goldsmith's loneliness in London, because I wish to call attention to another distinctively Irish trait in the poet's character which will help to explain, or, if you like, extenuate, his boyish and boisterous outbursts—his profoundly Irish, *i.e.*, profoundly melancholy, temperament. The English idea of the Irishman is that caricatured on the stage, where he is always represented as unthinking, irresponsible, the very impersonation of "gaiety without eclipse"; and such, no doubt, is the social and surface aspect of the Irishman presented to his English associates. But these irresponsible moods and moments are mere moods and moments, transitory and often reactionary—a reaction from

the settled and profound melancholy which is the base of the Irish temperament. It would seem paradoxical to say that the Irish seem such a merry, because they are such a melancholy, race, but there is truth in the paradox. Is there anything more characteristic of national temperament than national music? But what is the character of Irish national music? It is either profoundly melancholy or recklessly rollicking—a dirge or a jig. And the one is the reaction from the other. Swift sneers sardonically: “If you observe when you walk through the streets, you will see the merriest faces in mourning coaches.” And so, indeed, you will. Not of course in the coaches of the chief mourners, nor in any coach *en route* to the cemetery; but in other coaches than those of the chief mourners and on the return journey. It is the reaction from the prolonged and profound strain of mourning melancholy.

Now much Irish merriment, and not Irish only but sometimes also English—witness Charles Lamb’s boisterous moods even in sober moments—is similarly reactionary and is correlated with profound melancholy. Most certainly Goldsmith’s temperament, judging from contemporary accounts of his many moody moments, was of this Irish kind—of the opposite kind, that is, to the sanguine, joyous temperament attributed to him by his biographers.

De Quincey, for instance, in his sympathetic essay on Goldsmith writes:—“Goldsmith enjoyed two immunities from suffering that have been much overlooked; and *such* immunities that, in our opinion, four in five of all the people ever connected with his works, as publishers, printers, compositors (that is, men taken at random) have very probably suffered

more than he. The immunities were these:—1st, from any *bodily* taint of low spirits. He had a constitutional gaiety of heart; an elastic hilarity; and as he himself expresses it, ‘a knack of hoping’—which knack could not be bought with Ormus and with Ind, nor hired for a day with the peacock-throne of Delhi. How easy it was to bear the brutal affront of being to his face described as ‘Doctor Minor,’ when one hour or less would dismiss the ‘Doctor Major,’ so invidiously contradistinguished from himself, to a struggle with scrofulous melancholy; whilst *he*, if returning to solitude and a garret, was returning also to habitual cheerfulness. *There* lay one immunity, beyond all price, from a mode of strife to which others, by a large majority, are doomed—strife with bodily wretchedness. Another immunity he had of almost equal value, and yet almost equally forgotten by biographers—viz., from the responsibilities of a family. Wife and children he had not. They it is that, being a man’s chief blessings, create also for him the deadliest of his anxieties, that stuff his pillow with thorns, that surround his daily path with snares.”

Goldsmith’s “knack at hoping” was gone with his youth, and his youth was long gone. The process of disillusionment for which old age stands depends rather upon experience than upon years; and so far as disillusioning experience was concerned, Goldsmith at forty was as old as most men at eighty. For the rest, as I say, his temperament was essentially Irish, profoundly melancholy in solitude, however bright and even boisterous might be the reactionary outbursts of merriment in society. Indeed the evidence of all his intimates is cumulative and con-

clusive as to his frequent fits of moodiness, even in society, in these later years. But Goldsmith's lonely wretchedness in these years was as deep as Johnson's. For there is another side to De Quincey's picture of marriage as a mere extension of a man's misery, because it gives, in Bacon's phrase, "hostages to fortune." If, for example, Goldsmith had, as he once meditated, married Kelly's sister-in-law, and if he had been as happy in his marriage as his rival playwright, he would have had less thorns in his pillow and have felt less those that he had. Such a wife would have kept him out of difficulties, and would by her sympathy have lightened immeasurably all his other troubles. Most troubles, indeed, live and grow in darkness, like those crawling creatures that thrive under a stone in a field: you lift the stone and let the light in upon them and they vanish. But Goldsmith's miseries were multiplied and magnified in the darkness of his loneliness, and that the loneliness of London and even of Club-life in London. "Why do you not join a club?" said dear old James Payn to me once when, on my first visit to London, I was complaining of its polar loneliness. "How would that help?" I answered; "not one of my fellow-members would care if I were hanged to-morrow." "My dear fellow," cried Payn fervently, "you are quite wrong there. They would all be delighted if you were hanged to-morrow—for then they could say: 'Why I knew that fellow, King.'" My cynical readers will see a double happiness in this thrust of my old friend—at me no less than at the London clubs. But, the hit, however I may have deserved it, was not aimed at me by the most polite and amiable of men. It was from his experi-

ence of clubs this clubable man spoke, and Goldsmith was little likely to have found any of his clubs more sympathetic. Even after death should have "opened the gate to good fame and extinguished envy—*Extinctus amabitur idem*," Johnson had to rebuke thus the detraction of Goldsmith's old fellow-clubmen. Rising with great dignity and looking them full in the face he said, "If nobody was suffered to abuse poor Goldy but those who could write as well, he would have few censors." And I need not say that during his life Goldsmith was left in little doubt—as his wistful remark to Reynolds about the envy which robbed the successful literary man of affection, shows—that a club was the last place in which to look for sympathy. It was the last place also in which he showed need of sympathy. Generally he rattled away at his clubs boyishly, even boisterously, as if he had not a care in the world. But these sallies were often reactionary rebounds from hours of desperate despondency and indicated (the very opposite of what they seemed to indicate) a harassed mind.

When that pert minx, Miss Clara Brooke, once rebuked the uproariousness of his merriment by quoting to him his own line,

"And the loud laugh which speaks the vacant mind,"

she had little idea that his mirth spoke the reverse of a vacant mind, in its classical sense of a mind free from care. The miserable and solitary Irishman escaping for the moment from himself was uproarious in his mirth because of his joy at that escape. This will help to account for many of Goldsmith's boyish and boisterous outbursts, which might almost be taken as the measure not of his

high, but of his low spirits. Henceforward to its troubled close Goldsmith's life was lonely, unhappy and harassed. Most of the work he had to do was drudgery of the dreariest kind, and he had to do it with the heart-breaking certainty that it would be interminable. His difficulties, in fact, were irredeemable because he was irredeemable himself. What, you ask, was to prevent him living within an income which was princely compared with that of his early days? You might as well ask what was to prevent him being a curmudgeon? He was as much congenitally improvident and extravagant as he was congenitally simple, kindly, genial and generous. His whole character hangs together, woof and warp, and you cannot tear out the dark threads without tearing out the threads of gold inextricably interwoven therewith. But, unlike most of "the great race," his debts made him more miserable than they made even his creditors, and that with an incommunicable misery which he brooded over alone.

No man, then, I think, in all lonely London could feel more deeply what Johnson felt at the height of his fame and expressed in his memorable letter to Lord Chesterfield, that the grudging acknowledgment of his position in the world of letters had come too late—"I am solitary and cannot impart it." All those whom Goldsmith would have loved to have convinced by his success that their old loving-kindness to him had not really been wasted on a wastrel had passed beyond these voices, and he could hope no more to return to them an acknowledged great man,

"Around my fire an evening group to draw,
And tell of all I felt and all I saw."

He had, too, a nearer and more tragic loss to make him unhappy than that of mother, brother or uncle—the loss of his old self. Immediately after the publication of *The Deserted Village* he went abroad with the most sympathetic of all his English friends, with whom he had found always the nearest approach to a home—with the Hornecks, the Jessamy Bride, Little Comedy and their mother; but the tour, so far as Goldsmith was concerned, was a failure. It was a failure because “he took himself with him,” and because that self was not his old self. Writing from Calais and from Paris to Reynolds he says:—“With regard to myself I find that travelling at twenty and at forty are very different things. I set out with all my confirmed habits about me, and I can find nothing on the Continent as good as when I formerly left it. . . . I expect returning when we have stayed out one month, which I should not care if it were over this day. . . . I will soon be among you, better pleased with my situation at home than I ever was before. And yet, I must say, that if anything could make France pleasant, the very good women with whom I am at present would certainly do it.”

He was happier at twenty, when alone and penniless, he trusted, as he tramped from country to country, to chance and charity for bed and board, than he was at forty, travelling in a carriage in comfort and in the company the most charming to him of any in the world. The *Non sum qualis eram* no doubt goes for much in accounting for his disappointment with an expedition to which he had looked forward with such pleasure. At twenty, sitting down to the banquet or life with an appetite keen and unjaded, beef and beef

seem ambrosia and nectar, but at forty your jaded appetite turns in distaste even from ambrosia and nectar. But, besides, Goldsmith was worried with his increasing and inextricable difficulties. "As for our intended journey to Devonshire," he writes again to Reynolds, "I find it out of my power to perform it, for, as soon as I arrive at Dover I intend to let the ladies go on, and I will take a country lodging somewhere near that place in order to do some business. I have so outrun the constable that I must mortify a little to bring it up again."

This trip abroad with Hornecks, may I say in passing, has done Goldsmith's reputation as little good as it did himself, since in it occurred two trivial incidents which have been misrepresented to his disadvantage. Boswell, as I have noted already, interpreted Goldsmith's speech of affected offence at the admiration the French officers showed at Lisle to the Jessamy Bride and her sister:—"Elsewhere I also have my admirers!" to mean "that he was seriously angry that more attention was paid to them than to him." Yet the Jessamy Bride herself in telling the story always explained that Goldsmith spoke with affected pique and in the merest jest.

Then there is the other story told to Goldsmith's discredit by "special attorney," Hickey, whose rudeness is softened in *Retaliation* into "bluntness":—

"Too courteous, perhaps, or obligingly flat?
His very worst foes can't accuse him of that."

This Hickey, who joined Goldsmith's party in Paris, made everyone laugh on his return by his account of the poet's vainglorious boast that he could clear at a leap a fountain at Versailles, into which he fell in the

attempt. This is always quoted to Goldsmith's discredit as a piece of bounce, whereas it was a piece of mere boyishness. No one quotes to the discredit of Johnson his insisting, when an old man, on rolling his colossal form over and over from the top to the bottom of a hill. Occasional boyishness of this kind is held even in England to be an evidence rather of mental sanity than of silliness, as indeed the proverb, "The man who is never a fool is always a fool," suggests. Goldsmith, who was a boy all his life, made the mistake of playing the fool in the presence of fools. When "the great Dr Clark," as Boswell calls him, was making a knot of men merry in the pump-room at Bath, he saw Beau Nash approaching and whispered the caution, "Boys, boys, let us be grave: here's a fool coming!" There is nothing a fool more enjoys than to catch a wise man tripping, and the greater the fool and the greater the wise man, the greater the delight at the lapse. The delight of the little sweep at Lamb's fall in the gutter was precisely proportioned to the age and respectability of Elia. The fall in the gutter of another little sweep of his own age, and black as himself, would have been a delight certainly to the child, but nothing approaching the delight of seeing a grave, grown-up man in spotless broadcloth rolling in the mud. Now, part of this little sweep's delight was due to the incongruity of the spectacle of the tumble of a grave grown man and of broadcloth in the mire; but part also was due to gratified envy, charmed to see "its better" reduced even for a moment to its own low and begrimed level.

In the same way such creatures as Hickey and Hawkins were delighted to note and report any random speech or boyish freak of Goldsmith's, in part

because of the "Inspired Idiot" paradox, but in part because it seemed to reduce the poet to their own level.

To return, however, to the point from which I started in this chapter, much of the boyish and boisterous merriment of Goldsmith was reactionary—the merriment of a melancholy temperament and of a sad and solitary man, who, escaping from himself in company, is as noisily happy as a schoolboy escaped from school. A great deal of the noisy merriment of Irishmen is of this kind—of the kind Byron notes :—

"And if I laugh at any mortal thing,
'Tis that I may not weep."

CHAPTER XIX

"THE HAUNCH OF VENISON"

BEFORE Goldsmith went abroad with the Hornecks he wrote a *Life of Parnell*, wrote it to order hurriedly and perfunctorily. It was a congenial task, however, and a deserved success, as Johnson gracefully testifies in his *Lives of the Poets* :—" *The Life of Parnell*," he says there, "is a task which I should very willingly decline, since it has been lately written by Goldsmith, a man of such variety of powers and such felicity of performance that he always seemed to do best that which he was doing ; a man who had the art of being minute without tediousness, and general without confusion ; whose language was copious without exuberance, exact without restraint, and easy without weakness. What such an author has told us who would tell again ?"

Of this variety and versatility of powers Goldsmith gave new evidence in his poem written for Lord Clare and never meant for publication—(indeed it was not published till two years after the poet's death), *The Haunch of Venison*. Goldsmith and Lord Clare were fellow-countrymen and close friends, so close that upon the death of Lord Clare's only son the poet paid the peer a long and sympathetic visit. Lord Clare's only daughter, too, was a playfellow of the poet's, for at this time she was a child, while he, as she used to say of him long afterwards, was never

anything else. He played games with her and she played tricks on him, and to the last hour of her long life, Mr Forster says, speaking on the testimony of her son, Lord Nugent, "she dearly loved his memory."

Childlike also was a naïve speech of Goldsmith's in reference to this stay with Lord Clare, which has as usual been reported to his discredit. In a mixed company he one day complained thus of Lord Camden :—"I met Lord Camden at Lord Clare's house in the country, and he took no more notice of me than if I had been an ordinary man." This complaint was greeted with shouts of laughter from all the company excepting Johnson. "Nay, gentlemen," said Johnson, "Doctor Goldsmith is right. A nobleman ought to have made up to such a man as Goldsmith ; and I think it is much against Lord Camden that he neglected him."

Goldsmith's mistake—a mistake he was making continually to his continual discredit—was expressing what another man would have suppressed. Any other man of his literary distinction, however modest, would have *thought* what Goldsmith expressed—that Lord Camden had not shown him due consideration ; for it must be remembered that Lord Camden was not a mere Count Zaehdarm nobleman, who knew and cared nothing for literature, but an ex-Lord Chancellor, who might be supposed to respect intellectual eminence. In truth, Goldsmith's naïve remark indicated rather his usual self-distrust than self-esteem. I venture to say that any other man of equal literary distinction would have interpreted Lord Camden's slight not to his own discredit but to Lord Camden's—as his lordship's petty revenge for having been black-balled by the Club. When

the Chancellor suffered this indignity Goldsmith was one of its members. But Goldsmith, like all self-conscious and self-distrustful men, was for ever on the lookout for slurs and slights of this kind, and he had never far or long to look for them! As for his naïve expression, then, of his sense of this slight of Lord Camden's, it was naïve, that was all. Goldsmith's tongue hung by a hair-trigger to his thought, and all that other men keep to themselves he blurted out incontinently. “Johnson,” writes Boswell, “said Goldsmith was very envious.” I defended him by observing that he owned it frankly on all occasions. “Sir,” replied Johnson, “you are enforcing the charge. He had so much envy that he could not conceal it. He was so full of it that he overflowed. He talked of it to be sure often enough. Now, sir, what a man avows he is not ashamed to think, though many a man thinks what he is ashamed to avow.” If Goldsmith so overflowed with the gall of envy, how is it that none of it spilled over into his writings? “Whatever appeared of this kind in Goldsmith,” writes Percy, “was a mere momentary sensation, which he knew not how like other men to conceal. It was never the result of principle, or the suggestion of reflection: it never embittered his heart or influenced his conduct.” If every actor, singer, author, soldier or sailor, every man, I mean, who is “a fool to fame,” expressed in words the passing envy in his thoughts, he would be considered a monster of that base passion. Goldsmith was singular only in “wearing his heart upon his sleeve for daws to peck at.” “Goldsmith,” said Tom Davies, “was so sincere a man that he could not conceal what was uppermost in his mind”; and

he adds of his supposed envy, "His envy was so childish and so absurd that it may be very easily pardoned, for everybody laughed at it; and no man was ever very mischievous whose errors excited mirth. Goldsmith never formed any scheme or joined in any combination to hurt any man living."

In truth, it was with Goldsmith as Elia says it was with himself, "In what is called good company he would, when some unlucky occasion provoked it, stammer out some senseless pun (not altogether senseless perhaps if rightly taken) which has stamped his character for the evening. It was hit or miss with him and nine times out of ten he contrived," adds Elia, "to send away a whole company his enemies." That was true also of Goldsmith if you read instead of "pun" joke, and instead of "enemies," scorners. And as with Elia, so with Goldsmith nine times out of ten; the "anti-Caledonian intellect" (so admirably described in "*Imperfect Sympathies*") in conflict with the Caledonian explained the misunderstanding.

May I take in illustration the story which the gentleman who nicknamed the poet "An Inspired Idiot" said "was a picture of Goldsmith's entire life"? Goldsmith praised in a newspaper paragraph Lord Mayor Townshend, the *protégé* of Lord Shelburne, whom *Junius* had denounced as "Malagrida." On the night of the same day on which the paragraph appeared Goldsmith happened to sit next Lord Shelburne in Drury Lane Theatre when his lordship expressed to him a hope that he had said nothing about "Malagrida" in the article. Goldsmith in replying, added, "Do you know that I never could conceive the reason why they call you 'Malagrida,'

for Malagrida was a very good sort of man." "You see plainly," says the spiteful Beauclerk in the letter to Lord Charlemont in which he tells the anecdote, "you see plainly what Goldsmith meant to say; but that happy turn of expression is peculiar to himself. Mr Walpole says that this story is a picture of Goldsmith's whole life." Here an obvious ellipsis, due to hurry of thought, is fastened upon as though it were due to denseness or confusion of thought! An Irishman who would be the first to make this blunder would be the first also to see it, and he would be the first to make it and to see it—because of his quickwittedness. To me too that story, *with Beauclerk's and Walpole's remarks upon it*, "is a picture of Goldsmith's whole life" in London, where, to quote again from Elia's *Imperfect Sympathies*, no one's mind was ever "caught in undress." I admit that Goldsmith ought to have said, and with due emphasis, to Lord Shelburne, "Do you know that I never could conceive the reason why they call you 'Malagrida' *as a term of reproach*, for Malagrida was a very good sort of man." If he had spoken slowly and with due emphasis the words "as a term of reproach," he would have been at once understood! In a word, Goldsmith's thought in the ellipsis outstripped his tongue, and if the speech is to be taken "as a picture of Goldsmith's whole life," then it indicates, what all his extempore writing indicates, a mind the reverse of slow-witted or muddle-headed.

The happiest specimen of this extempore writing is perhaps *The Haunch of Venison*, thrown off by Goldsmith on his return from his visit to Lord Clare in acknowledgment of the venison sent after him

by his host. It owed something to the third satire of Boileau, as Boileau's third satire owed something to the eighth satire in Horace's second book. Goldsmith's touch, however, is far lighter and brighter than either Boileau's or Horace's, as light and bright as Pope's in *The Rape of the Lock*, and much more easy and natural. No one has noted, though I think it worth noting, that Goldsmith has himself only to blame—his own brag and bounce—for the rape of the venison, and perhaps it is also worth noting that it never occurred to him—as it never would have occurred to him in reality—to keep a morsel of the delicacy for himself. I must quote from the poem as an admirable specimen of Goldsmith's lightness of touch and brightness of humour :—

“Thanks, my Lord, for your venison, for finer or fatter
Never ranged in a forest, or smoked in a platter ;
The haunch was a picture for painters to study,
The fat was so white and the lean was so ruddy.
Though my stomach was sharp, I could scarce help
regretting

To spoil such a delicate picture by eating.
I had thoughts in my chamber to place it in view,
To be shown to my friends us a piece of *virtu* ;
As in some Irish houses—where things are so-so—
One gammon of bacon hangs up for a show ;
But for eating a rasher of what they take pride in,
They'd as soon think of eating the pan it is fried in.

To go on with my tale, as I gazed on the haunch,
I thought of a friend that was trusty and staunch,
So I cut it and sent it to Reynolds undrest,
To paint it, or eat it, just as he liked best.
Of the neck and the breast I had next to dispose—
’Twas a neck and a breast that might rival Monroe’s !
But in parting with these I was puzzled again,
With the how, and the who, and the where, and the
when.

There's H—d, and C—y, and H—rth, and H—ff,
 I think they love venison, I know they love beef.
 There's my countryman, Higgins—Oh ! let him alone
 For making a blunder or picking a bone.
 But, hang it ! to poets, who seldom can eat,
 Your very good mutton's a very good treat ;
 Such dainties to them their health it might hurt ;
 It's like sending them ruffles when wanting a shirt.
 While thus I debated, in reverie centred,
 An acquaintance—a friend as he called himself—entered.
 An under-bred, fine-spoken fellow was he,
 And he smiled as he looked at the venison and me.
 'What have we got here ? Why this is good eating !
 Your own, I suppose ? Or is it in waiting ?'
 'Why, whose should it be ?' cried I, with a flounce,
 'I get these things often' (but that was a bounce).
 'Some lords, my acquaintance, that settle the nation,
 Are pleased to be kind—but I hate ostentation.'
 'If that be the case then,' cried he, very gay,
 'I'm glad that I've taken this house on my way.
 To-morrow you take a poor dinner with me :
 No words—I insist on't—precisely at three :
 We'll have Johnson and Burke ; all the wits will be
 there ;
 My acquaintance is slight, or I'd ask my Lord Clare.
 And now that I think on't, as I am a sinner !
 We wanted this venison to make out a dinner.
 What say you ? A pasty ? It shall and it must,
 And my wife, little Kitty, is famous for crust.
 Here, porter !—This venison with me to Mile-end ;
 No stirring, I beg—my dear friend—my dear friend !'
 Thus, snatching his hat, he brushed off, like the wind,
 And the porter and eatables followed behind."

The poet, left speechless, had to console himself with the hope of meeting Johnson and Burke ; but in their places next day he found a Scot and a Jew—such a Scot and such a Jew !—wedged with him and his host and hostess into "a chair-lumbered closet, just twelve feet by nine." However, there was at

least the venison pasty to fall back upon. But when dinner was served :—

“ At the top a fried liver and bacon were seen,
 At the bottom was tripe in a swingeing tureen ;
 At the sides there was spinach and pudding made hot ;
 In the middle a place where the pasty—was not !
 Now, my Lord, as for tripe 'tis my utter aversion,
 And your bacon I hate like a Turk or a Persian ;
 So there I sat stuck like a horse in a pound,
 While the bacon and liver went merrily round.
 But what vexed me most was that d——d Scottish rogue,
 With his long-winded speeches, his smiles and his
 brogue ;
 ‘ And, Madam,’ quoth he, ‘ may this bit be my poison,
 A prettier dinner I never set eyes on :
 Pray, a slice of your liver, tho’ may I be curst,
 But I’ve eat of your tripe till I’m ready to burst.’
 ‘ The tripe,’ quoth the Jew with his chocolate cheek,
 I could dine on this tripe seven days in a week ;
 I like these here dinners, so pretty and small :
 But your friend there, the Doctor, eats nothing at all.’
 ‘ Ho, ho !’ quoth my friend, ‘ he’ll come on in a
 trice,
 He’s keeping a corner for something that’s nice ;
 There’s a pasty !—‘ A pasty !’ repeated the Jew,
 ‘ I don’t care if I keep a corner for’t too.’
 ‘ What the de’il, mon, a pasty !’ re-echoed the Scot,
 ‘ Tho’ splitting I’ll still keep a corner for thot.’
 ‘ We’ll all keep a corner !’ the lady cried out ;
 ‘ We’ll all keep a corner !’ was echoed about.
 While thus we resolved, and the pasty delayed,
 With looks that quite petrified entered the maid ;
 A visage so sad and so pale with affright,
 Waked Priam in drawing his curtains by night.
 But we quickly found out—for who could mistake
 her ?—
 That she came with some terrible news from the
 baker.
 And so it fell out : For that negligent sloven
 Had shut out the pasty in shutting his oven !”

Goldsmith winds up the poem with a graceful compliment to Lord Clare :—

“A least, it's your temper, as very well known,
That you think very slightly of all that's your own :
So perhaps in your habit of thinking amiss,
You may make a mistake and think slightly of this.”

The Haunch of Venison is notable for one of the very few personal attacks made by Goldsmith in his writings, for the Scot on whom *Cinna* was rightly fathered, and who “owns to Panurge,” was that scandalous and scurrilous Parson Scott who was rewarded by a rich Northumberland living for his ribald abuse of the opponents of the Government. There could not be two more mutually antipathetic characters than Goldsmith and this mercenary and malignant Scotch parson, as the following anecdote related by Basil Montagu suggests :—

“A few months before the death of Dr Scott, author of *Anti-Sejanus* and other political tracts in support of Lord North's administration, I happened to dine with him in company with my friend, Sir George Tuthill, who was the doctor's physician. After dinner Dr Scott mentioned, as a matter of astonishment and a proof of the folly of men who are according to common opinion ignorant of the world, that he was sent once with a *carte blanche* from the Ministry to Oliver Goldsmith to induce him to write in favour of the administration. ‘I found him,’ he said, “in a miserable set of chambers in the Temple. I told him my authority ; I told him that I was empowered to pay most liberally for his exertions ; and, would you believe it ? he was so absurd as to say, “I can earn as much as will supply my wants without

writing for any party ; the assistance you offer is therefore unnecessary to me." And so I left him, added the reverend doctor with indignant scorn, 'in his garret !' "

It would seem a paradox to say that we owe *The Haunch of Venison* to the same quickness of thought which was responsible for the "Malagrida" blunder or rather ellipsis, "a picture," to Walpole, "of Goldsmith's whole life" ; but it is true nevertheless. Only the other day a Professor of Agriculture, to whom I was complaining of the excessive use of the bearing-rein in London, assured me that it was indispensable for the control of swift, high-bred and high-fed horses, which it prevented in their impatient impetuosity from stumbling or bolting. Goldsmith in London would have been wise to have worn the mental equivalent of a bearing rein.

CHAPTER XX

AT PLAY

THE *Life of Parnell* was such a success that it encouraged Davies to order from Goldsmith a *Life of Bolingbroke*, which, however, was written in such haste, and amid such distractions as that of his visit to Lord Clare in the country, that it was but a sorry piece of work. Yet it was a less distasteful piece of drudgery than the double-distilled compilation he had now in hand—the abridgment of his own *Roman History* into a single duodecimo volume. By a relentless fate he is doomed still to tread the shadow of his Peckham Academy prison-house and to compile school-books instead of composing pastorals. On the other hand, these compilations, which cost him comparatively little, paid him incomparably better than his poetry. What old Fuller says of learning is yet more true of literature:—“It hath gained most by those books by which the printers have lost.” At any rate the world has gained most by books which have brought least gain to their writers, since a book which “is not of an age, but for all time,” is for all time because it is not of an age—not specially aimed at the opportune and popular but at the passing tastes of its own generation. If Shakespeare, to whom Johnson paid this compliment, was for both an age and for all time, it was in right of his being a dramatist, since the dramatist *must* write for

the groundlings as well as for the fit and few, if he is to succeed at all. Hence, as in Shakespeare's day, so in Goldsmith's, and so also in our own ; the classical works which are at once classical and popular, which appeal at once to their own age and to all ages, are, speaking generally, dramatic. Only for the theatre could Goldsmith hope to do original work that would be also popular and lucrative, and to the theatre therefore he again prepared to appeal. Such hours as he could steal from his *Animated Nature*, from the abridgment of his *Roman History* and from the compilation of his *History of England* he devoted to the composition of *She Stoops to Conquer*. From the following letter to Bennet Langton he would seem to have finished almost simultaneously the comedy and the *History of England*.

"MY DEAR SIR,"—he writes to Langton about a year after his return from his continental trip—"Since I had the pleasure of seeing you last I have been almost wholly in the country at a farmer's house, quite alone, trying to write a comedy. It is now finished ; but when or how it will be acted, or whether it will be acted at all, are questions I cannot resolve. I am, therefore, so much employed upon that, that I am under the necessity of putting off my intended visit to Lincolnshire for the season. Reynolds is just returned from Paris and finds himself now in the case of a truant that must make up for his idle time by diligence. We have, therefore, agreed to postpone our journey till next summer, when we hope to have the honour of waiting upon Lady Rothes"—Langton had recently married one of the three Countess-Dowagers of Rothes—"and you, and staying double

the time of our late intended visit. We often meet and never without remembering you. I see Mr Beauclerk very often, both in town and country. He is now going directly forward to become a second Boyle: deep in chemistry and physics. Johnson has been down upon a visit to a country parson, Doctor Taylor, and is returned now to his old haunts at Mrs Thrale's. Burke is a farmer, *en attendant* a better place; but visiting about too. Every soul is visiting about and merry except myself. And that is hard too, as I have been trying these three months to do something to make people laugh. There have I been strolling about the hedges studying jests with a most tragical countenance. The *Natural History* is about half finished, and I will shortly finish the rest. God knows I am tired of this kind of finishing, which is but bungling work; and that, not so much my fault as the fault of my scurvy circumstances. They begin to talk in town of the Opposition's gaining ground; the cry of liberty is still as loud as ever. I have published, or Davis has published for me, *An Abridgment of the History of England*, for which I have been a good deal abused in the newspapers for betraying the liberties of the people. God knows I had no thought for or against liberty in my head—my whole aim being to make a book of a decent size that, as Squire Richard says, 'would do no harm to nobody.' However, they set me down as an arrant Tory, and consequently an honest man. When you come to look at any part of it you'll say that I am a sour Whig. God bless you! and with my respectful compliments to her ladyship.—I remain, dear sir, your most affectionate, humble servant,

"OLIVER GOLDSMITH."

Hardly had he postponed the visit to Langton than he accepted an invitation to Barton, and the reason why he postponed the first and immediately accepted the second may be read between the lines of the letters he wrote to Bennet Langton and to Mrs Bunbury. Mrs Bunbury was "Little Comedy," and at her house at Barton he met her sister, "The Jessamy Bride," and a host of little children; and here, therefore, he could play the child and play the fool and be absolutely at home and at his ease. His usual exordium, indeed, was, "Come now, let us play the fool a little," for he knew that he could play it here without a fool's misinterpretation. He played all kinds of tricks and had all kinds of tricks played upon him, and was always in good humour and even in good spirits. "Some difference of opinion," said Mrs Gwynn, "The Jessamy Bride," recalling this visit years after, "having arisen with Lord Harrington respecting the depth of a pond, the poet remarked that it was not so deep, but that if anything valuable was to be found at the bottom he would not hesitate to pick it up. His Lordship, after some banter, threw in a guinea. Goldsmith, not to be outdone in this kind of bravado, in attempting to fulfil his promise without getting wet, accidentally fell in, to the amusement of all present, but persevered, brought out the money and kept it, remarking that he had abundant objects on whom to bestow any further proofs of his lordship's whim or bounty." She adds that he was most of all at home in a romp with children. Here, to be sure, Goldsmith is at one with a fellow-countryman who in all other respects contrasts with him—the Duke of Wellington. The Duke boasted truly that, as he never took, he never allowed

a liberty, and indeed he brought even royalty up with a round turn when it dared to make free with him; nevertheless, there was nothing he loved more than a romp with children, who pinched and slapped and slopped tea purposely over him to his great delight. But while the Iron Duke only played at being a child with children, as Hector doffed his helmet for a moment to take Astyanax in his arms, Goldsmith *was* a child. He had all the sensitiveness, the self-consciousness, the frankness, the frolic, the sudden sun and shade, and the inconsiderateness, indiscretion and irresponsibility of childhood. Therefore he was at ease and at home with children and with those whose "child's heart within the man's" still beat responsive to his mood.

How different the Barton Goldsmith was from "The Club" Goldsmith, or even from the Goldsmith of Langton—whose host was the most amiable of all the members of "The Club"—may be inferred from a comparison of the letter which I have just quoted with the letter which I am about to quote. It is a reply to an invitation from Mrs Bunbury to their Christmas party, in which "Little Comedy" playfully advised the poet to come dressed in his best spring-velvet coat, in a wig suitable to a dance with the hay-makers, and, above all, to be prepared to follow always her sister's advice and her own in playing loo. "Letters," says Bacon, "are of all the words of men in my judgment the best; for they are more natural than orations and public speeches, and more advised than conferences or present speeches." Accept Goldsmith's letters thus as intermediate between his writings and his random speeches, and you will have a truer picture of the

man than Boswell's or Walpole's or Garrick's. And especially characteristic is this reply to an invitation to a place where he was intimately and absolutely at home :—

“MADAM,—I read your letter with all that allowance which critical candour could require, but, after all, find so much to object to and so much to raise my indignation that I cannot help giving it a serious answer.

“I am not so ignorant, Madam, as not to see there are many sarcasms contained in it, and solecisms also. (*‘Solecism’* is a word that comes from the town of Soleis in Attica, among the Greeks, built by Solon, and applied as we use the word *‘Kidderminster’* for curtains from a town of that name—but this is learning you have no taste for!)—I say, Madam, there are many sarcasms in it and solecisms also. But, not to seem an ill-natured critic, I'll take leave to quote your own words, and give you my remarks upon them as they occur. You begin as follows :—

“‘I hope, my good Doctor, you soon will be here,
And your spring-velvet coat very smart will appear,
To open our ball the first day of the year.’

Pray, Madam, where did you ever find the epithet *‘good’* applied to the title of Doctor? Had you called me *‘learned Doctor,’* or *‘grave Doctor,’* or *‘noble Doctor,’* it might be allowable, because they belong to the profession. But, not to cavil at trifles, you talk of my *‘spring-velvet coat’* and advise me to wear it the first day in the year, that is, in the middle of winter—a spring-velvet coat in the middle

of winter!!!! That would be a solecism indeed! And yet, to increase the inconsistency, in another part of your letter you call me 'a beau.' Now, on one side or other you must be wrong. If I am a beau I can never think of wearing a spring-velvet in winter: and, if I am not a beau, why, then, that explains itself. But let me go on to your two next strange lines:

“‘And bring with you a wig that is modish and gay,
To dance with the girls that are makers of hay.’

The absurdity of making hay at Christmas you yourself seem sensible of. You say your sister will laugh; and so, indeed, she well may! The Latins have an expression for a contemptuous kind of laughter, '*naso contemnere adunco*'—that is, to laugh with a crooked nose. She may laugh at you in the manner of the ancients if she thinks fit. But now I come to the most extraordinary of all extraordinary propositions, which is, to take your and your sister's advice in playing at loo. The presumption of the offer raises my indignation beyond the bounds of prose. It inspires me at once with verse and with resentment. / take advice! And from whom? You shall hear:

“‘First let me suppose, what may shortly be true,
The company set and the word to be Loo:
All smirking and pleasant and big with adventure,
And ogling the stake which is fixed in the centre.
Round and round go the cards, while I inwardly
damn
At never once finding a visit from Pam.
I lay down my stake, apparently cool,
While the harpies about me all pocket the pool.

I fret in my gizzard, yet cautious and sly,
 I wish all my friends may be bolder than I.
 Yet still they sit snug ; not a creature will aim
 By losing their money to venture at fame.
 'Tis in vain that at niggardly caution I scold,
 'Tis in vain that I flatter the brave and the bold :
 All play their own way, and they think me an ass—
 'What does Mrs Bunbury?' 'I, Sir? I pass.'
 'Pray what does Miss Horneck? Take courage; come,
 do.'

'Who, I? Let me see, Sir; why I must pass too.'
 Mr Bunbury frets, and I fret like the devil,
 To see them so cowardly, lucky and civil.
 Yet still I sit snug, and continue to sigh on,
 Till, made by my losses as bold as a lion,
 I venture at all—while my avarice regards
 The whole pool as my own. 'Come, give me five
 cards.'

'Well done!' cry the ladies: 'Ah, Doctor, that's good!
 The pool's very rich—Ah! the Doctor is loo'd!'
 Thus foiled in my courage, on all sides perplexed,
 I ask for advice from the lady that's next:—
 'Pray, Ma'am, be so good as to give your advice;
 Don't you think the best way is to venture for't twice?'
 'I advise,' cries the lady, 'to try it, I own.'
 'Ah! the Doctor is loo'd! Come, Doctor, put down.'
 Thus playing and playing, I still grow more eager,
 And so bold and so bold, I'm at last a bold beggar.
 Now, ladies, I ask, if law matters you're skilled in,
 Whether crimes such as yours should not come before
 Fielding;

For giving advice that is not worth a straw,
 May well be called picking of pockets in law;
 And picking of pockets, with which I now charge ye,
 Is by quinto Elizabeth, Death without Clergy.
 What justice when both to the Old Bailey brought!
 By the Gods! I'll enjoy it, tho' 'tis but in thought!
 Both are placed at the bar with all proper decorum,
 With bunches of fennell and nosegays before 'em;
 Both cover their faces with mobs and all that,
 But the judge bids them angrily take off their hat.

When uncovered a buzz of enquiry goes round—

‘Pray, what are their crimes?’ ‘They’ve been pilfering found.’

‘Pray, whom have they pilfered?’ ‘A Doctor, I hear.’

‘What, yon solemn-faced, odd-looking man that stands near?’

‘The same.’ ‘What a pity! How does it surprise one!

Two handsomer culprits I never set eyes on!’

Then their friends all come round me with cringing and leering,

To melt me to pity and soften my swearing.

First, Sir Charles advances with phrases well strung,

‘Consider, dear Doctor, the girls are but young.’

‘The younger the worse,’ I return him again,

‘It shows that their habits are all dyed in grain.’

‘But then they’re so handsome, one’s bosom it grieves.’

‘What signifies handsome, when people are thieves?’

‘But where is your justice? Their cases are hard.’

‘What signifies *justice*? I want the *reward*.’

There’s the Parish of Edmonton offers forty pounds: There’s the Parish of St Leonard, Shore-ditch, offers forty pounds: There’s the Parish of Tyburn from the Hog-in-the-Pound to St Giles’ watch-house, offers forty pounds—I shall have all that if I convict them!

“‘But consider their case; it may yet be your own!

And see how they kneel! Is your heart made of stone?’

This moves:—So at last I agree to relent

For ten pounds in hand and ten pounds to be spent.’

“I challenge ye all to answer this. I tell you you cannot. It cuts deep—but now for the rest of the letter. And next—but I want room—so I believe I shall battle the rest out at Barton some day next week. I don’t value you all!—O. G.”

This playful piece of doggerel is, perhaps, worth

quoting because it suggests how much at ease and at home and happy he felt in the society of people who understood him sufficiently to take his boisterous gaiety for what it was—the riotous relief of a child escaped from school.

CHAPTER XXI

"SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER"

GOLDSMITH'S interludes of play were in these days "short and far between." He was in desperate difficulties, from which he could get even temporary relief only through the production of a successful comedy. But everything seemed against the production, not to say the success, of the comedy he had just finished. Opportuneness is everything in the success of a play, or for that matter, in every contemporary literary success. When Sir E. Russell congratulated Mr Rudyard Kipling upon the success of his *Recessional*, the poet answered with a shrug, "It was opportune; that's all. It is not *what* you write, but *when*." Many great works have slight contemporary success, and many contemporary successes are the reverse of great, because a meteor, being in our own atmosphere, shines brighter to our eyes than a fixed star which is outside our system, shining with a light so far above us that it takes a long time to reach us. By an odd irony the line,

"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,"

is quoted invariably to point the opposite moral to that Ulysses meant to express by it—that fashion blinds us by its glare to merit which is based solidly upon truth to nature:—

"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,
That all with one consent praise new-born gawds,

Though they are made and moulded of things past,
And give to dust that is a little gilt
More laud than gilt o'er dusted."

It is only by keeping in mind the blinding effect of fashion that we can understand the heart-breaking delays, difficulties, discouragements and disappointments which retarded and embarrassed the production of a comedy so sprightly and natural as *She Stoops to Conquer*.

Up to its production sentimental comedy, whose Muse seems to have been a genteel boarding-school miss subject to the vapours, was all the rage. Had Goldsmith been the feeble creature he is usually supposed to have been, he too must have been infected with the mawkish taste of the time, or must at least have pandered to it if he did not share it. With his singular versatility he must have succeeded in this vein as he had succeeded in all the other various veins he had attempted; but he deliberately defied the taste of the town and of the time, though he knew, as his essays show, how much this defiance would cost him.

Part of the cost and a heavy part too, was the killing worry attending on the production of *She Stoops to Conquer*. Its full-blooded and full-bodied life and humour, its wholesome heartiness, were in such absolute opposition to the anæmic comedy then in vogue that almost everyone concerned in its production despaired of its success. Colman himself, indeed, was so assured of its failure that he did what he could to ensure it. In the first place, he kept Goldsmith on the rack of an insupportable suspense, till at last the poet—to whom the production of the comedy meant extrication from pressing and

poignant distress—wrote to the manager the following desperate letter :—

“DEAR SIR,—I *entreat* you'll relieve me from that state of suspense in which I have been kept a long time. Whatever objections you have made, or shall make to my play, I will endeavour to remove and not argue about them. To bring in any new judges whether of its merit or its fault I can never submit to. Upon a former occasion, when my other play was before Mr Garrick, he offered to bring me before Mr Whitehead's tribunal, but I refused the proposal with indignation : I hope I shall not experience as hard treatment from you as from him. I have, as you know, a large sum of money to make up shortly ; by accepting my play I can readily satisfy my creditor that way ; at any rate I must look to some certainty to be prepared. For God's sake take the play and let us make the best of it, and let me have the same measure at least which you have given to as bad plays as mine.—I am your friend and servant,

“OLIVER GOLDSMITH.”

In answer Goldsmith had the manuscript of the play returned to him with so many disparaging and even demolishing criticisms on the blank pages that the author, now at his wits' end for money, sent off the play, criticisms and all, to Garrick.

At this point the never-failing Johnson intervened with prudent council and active help. He induced Goldsmith to reclaim the play from Garrick by representing to him the popular prejudice which would be created against it through its withdrawal from Covent Garden becoming public ; while he undertook to see Colman and to put upon him all possible

pressure to produce it forthwith. It needed all the pressure Johnson could put, as he afterwards assured Reynolds—"Colman," he said, "was only prevailed upon by much solicitation, nay, by a kind of force, to bring the comedy on."

Colman, on his part, so resented this pressure that he was resolved that a play forced upon him against his judgment should vindicate his judgment by its failure. He really took as much pains to ensure its failure as managers usually take to secure the success of an accepted play. To begin with, he so saturated his company with his own prejudice against the comedy that all the leading actors, except Shutter, threw up their parts! The defection of Mrs Abington seemed in itself and by itself fatal to the prospects of the play; but, to make assurance of its failure double sure, Woodward threw up the part of Tony Lumpkin, and Gentleman Smith that of young Marlow. To these cardinal points Quick (the harlequin of the theatre, who had been allotted in *The Good-Natured Man* only the petty part of post-boy) and Lee Lewis were promoted!

The prospects of the play with such a cast seemed so hopeless that Goldsmith was urged to postpone its production; but, as he could not postpone his money difficulties, he was forced to let the play take what seemed its sorry chance. "I'd rather," he said, making the best of a bad business, "that my play were damned by bad players than merely saved by good acting." In truth, the urgency of his creditors left him no alternative. He was utterly at the mercy of Colman and the manager's mercy was cruel. Colman was resolved to starve the comedy to death, not by the lack of adequate acting only,

but by the lack also of decent accessories. He would not allow a single new scene to be painted for it nor a single new dress provided ; while he was absolutely at pains to infect the public, as he had infected his company, with his own hopeless opinion of the play. At the very box-office of the theatre the servant who was sent to engage a box for the Duke of Gloucester was assured that the play was not worth seeing.

That Goldsmith himself, with his melancholy temperament and in his desperate circumstances, should be infected with these forebodings was inevitable. He had hardly even the heart to offer the copyright of the play to Newbery in payment of his debt to the publisher :—“ To tell you the truth, there are great doubts of its success,” he said frankly and gloomily when he proposed the sale.

On the evening of its production he attended the dinner presided over by Johnson where his friends mustered to his support ; but he could not eat a morsel and could hardly speak a word. After dinner, when they hurried off to the theatre, he dared not accompany them, but wandered away alone in an opposite direction. He was, in fact, face to face with ruin ; for the failure of the play—and its failure seemed to him assured—meant nothing less than financial ruin. It seemed to him in his despair to mean even more than financial ruin ; to mean bankruptcy of the brain as well as of the purse. If this play were the wretched thing dramatic experts had pronounced it, then he was written out. Only a man who has to depend for his bread wholly upon original brain work can realise the torture and the terror of this thought. Goldsmith, pursued by it as by a spectre, wandered he knew not whither until

in the Mall of St James' Park he met a friend who was amazed to find him outside the theatre where and while his fate was hanging in the balance. "Suppose," suggested the friend, "some alteration of the piece at the last moment might be thought advisable and you were not at hand to advise upon it?" On this hint, which was in keeping with all his forebodings, Goldsmith hurried back to the theatre, which he reached at the opening of the fifth act and in time to hear the only hiss of the evening! It confirmed all his fears. "What's that?" he cried to Colman, who, considerate to the last, answered, "Psha! Doctor, don't be afraid of a squib when we have been sitting these two hours on a barrel of gunpowder!" This spiteful remark was but Colman's spleenful expression of disappointment at the amazing success of a comedy whose failure he had been so assured of and had done what he could to assure. Indeed the hiss itself was probably a spiteful testimony to the success of the piece since there can be little doubt that the papers of the day were right in assigning it to one or other of Goldsmith's discomfited competitors, Kelly or Cumberland, in whose ears the applause given to the play sounded as the knell of their own school of sentimental comedy.

Not only were the papers of the day unanimous in their testimony to the merit of the comedy, to its success and to the wild enthusiasm of the audience "when it was given out for the author's benefit"; but even Horace Walpole, who hated Goldsmith, and who was himself hit by an allusion to a friend and to his club in the play, admitted that it "succeeded prodigiously," while insisting that its "lowness"

ought to have damned it. "I know of no comedy for many years," said Johnson, later, "that has so much exhilarated an audience, that has answered the great end of comedy—making an audience merry." Yet Cumberland—Sheridan's Sir Fretful Plagiary—writing thirty years later, declared that the applause was wholly factitious, proceeding only from *claqueurs* whom he had himself taken with him to the theatre to buoy up the foundering piece! Cumberland, who with Kelly—like Giant Pope and Pagan—could but bite his nails as he sat miserably in his seat seeing that his day was over! As an epigram in one of the papers of the day expressed it:—

"At Dr Goldsmith's merry play,
All the spectators laugh, they say,
The assertion, sir, I must deny,
For Cumberland and Kelly *cry*."

Nor did Goldsmith's triumph lack a captive bound to his chariot wheels, for Colman was so mercilessly taunted by the papers with his careful provisions for the failure of the comedy that he ran away to Bath to get out of hearing of his tormentors. But finding himself still pilloried in Bath he wrote to Goldsmith himself to get him released. "Colman," writes Johnson to Mrs Thrale, "is so distressed with abuse that he has solicited Goldsmith to take him off the rack of the newspapers."

Yet these newspapers and the biographers of Goldsmith are unduly severe upon Colman, who, after all, as Johnson said of managers, as he lived to please had to please to live. He had to trim his sail to take the popular breeze of the moment which had long blown steadily in the direction of

sentimental comedy; while *She Stoops to Conquer* was as audacious a challenge to sentimental comedy as could be offered. Loud laughter itself was low, but five acts of loud laughter, and of laughter aimed not indirectly only but even directly at the sentimental school, was indeed a daring venture. So far from bowing to the judgment of the town (which had insisted upon the elimination of the bailiff scene from *The Good-Natured Man* as low), Goldsmith gibbeted this silly snobbery in *She Stoops to Conquer*. "I love to hear the Squire sing," says one of Tony's gutter pals, "bekays he never gives us nothing that is low." "O damn anything that's low, I cannot bear it!" cries another. "The genteel thing is the genteel thing at any time," says a third, "if so be that a gentleman bees in a concatenation accordingly." "I like the maxum of it, Master Muggins," rejoins his friend. "What though I am obligated to dance a bear, a man may be a gentleman for all that. May this be my poison if my bear ever dances but to the very genteelest of tunes, *Water Parted*, or the minuet in *Ariadne*."

There was no mistaking these hits at the public who had hissed the bailiff scene in *The Good-Natured Man*, and they were not mistaken; but indeed the whole comedy was Goldsmith's defiant answer to the "False Delicacy" of the sentimental school.

Surely the strength of mind and the moral courage shown by this challenge to the public which had hissed the bailiff scene in *The Good-Natured Man* ought alone to suggest a reconsideration of the feeble idea of Goldsmith Boswell gives us? Let me take by contrast Sheridan's *Rivals*, brought upon the stage after the reaction against the sentimental

school initiated by Goldsmith had set well in. See how in this comedy Sheridan felt constrained to make to the sentimental taste of the public the unfortunate concession of the mawkish Faulkland and Julia episode, which so waterlogs the piece. Yet it was so far from waterlogging the piece on its first presentation to the public that it buoyed it up—absolutely saved it from damnation! Mr Bernard in his *Recollections* writes thus of the effect of this venture of Sheridan's upon a first night audience:—*The Rivals*, in my opinion, was a decided attempt to follow up the flow which Goldsmith had given in *She Stoops to Conquer*. My recollection of the manner in which *The Rivals* was received bears me out in that supposition. The audience were composed of two parties—those who supported the prevailing taste and those who were indifferent to it and liked nature. On the first night of a new play it was very natural that the former should predominate, and what was the consequence? Why, that Faulkland and Julia—which Sheridan had obviously introduced to conciliate the sentimentalists, but which in the present day are considered heavy incumbrances—were the characters most favourably received; whilst Sir Anthony Absolute, Bob Acres and Lydia, those faithful and diversified pictures of life, were barely tolerated; and Mrs Malaprop—as she deserved to be—was singled out for special vengeance."

But to these sentimentalists, who were a far more formidable force when *She Stoops to Conquer* was produced, Goldsmith made no concession whatever. Contrast the robust humour and human nature of the scenes and characters of *She Stoops to Conquer* with

the sickly Faulkland and Julia episode in *The Rivals*, and you will have an idea, though far from an adequate idea, of the contrast between Goldsmith's comedy and, say, Kelly's *False Delicacy*, which was such an opportune success. Now the taste which made *False Delicacy* such an opportune success still prevailed sufficiently to go near to wrecking *The Rivals* seven years later, in spite of Sheridan's Faulkland and Julia concession to it. How great, therefore, the probability of its wrecking only five years later *She Stoops to Conquer*, which was so far from making any concession to it that it defied and derided it!

It will be seen, then, that it was not so much to the discredit of Colman's judgment to be assured of the failure of *She Stoops to Conquer*, which was *wholly* made up of such scenes and characters as almost wrecked *The Rivals* two years later, without a single particle of that redeeming sentimental leaven which Sheridan found it necessary to introduce and whose introduction alone saved his play.

What, then, is really surprising is not Colman's fear, but Goldsmith's daring, and yet more that this daring should have been justified so triumphantly by the result. *She Stoops to Conquer* was played to crowded and enthusiastic houses to the end of the season; was played again in summer at the Haymarket, and in the following winter re-opened Covent Garden to resume there its successful run. The proceeds of the author's three nights—between four and five hundred pounds—satisfied the most pressing of his creditors, while the copyright of the comedy paid Newbery many times over. But the debt which it gave Goldsmith the deepest gratifica-

tion to discharge was paid in the dedication to Johnson:—

“DEAR SIR,—By inscribing this slight performance to you, I do not mean so much to compliment you as myself. It may do me some honour to inform the public that I have lived many years in intimacy with you. It may serve the interests of mankind also to inform them that the greatest wit may be found in a character without impairing the most unaffected piety. I have particularly reason to thank you for your partiality to this performance. The undertaking a comedy not merely sentimental was very dangerous; and Mr Colman, who saw the piece in its various stages, always thought so. However, I ventured to trust it to the public, and though it was necessarily delayed till late in the season, I have every reason to be grateful.—I am, dear sir, your most sincere friend and admirer,

“OLIVER GOLDSMITH.”

To Johnson more than to any man Goldsmith owed the submission of his comedy to the public verdict, but the favourableness of that verdict he owed to himself alone. Everything was against him—the manager, the company, the staging, the acting, but, above all, the fashion. Fashion has far more to do with the success of a play, whose fate a night or two decides, and decides by the voice chiefly of the gallery, than it has to do with that of a book, which appeals at once to a more deliberate verdict and to a more competent jury; and fashion, as I have just shown, so favoured the rival school of comedy that only its sentimental episode saved *The Rivals* two years later from damnation. But Goldsmith did not

stoop to conquer by any such concession, though the fashion he faced and fought was a far more formidable force than when Sheridan compromised with it to escape defeat. It is true that only a couple of years intervened between the first representation of *She Stoops to Conquer* and of *The Rivals*, but it was a couple of years *plus She Stoops to Conquer*, whose success dealt such a staggering blow to the sentimentalists as they never recovered. Time and Nature were on Goldsmith's side; for in time what is natural always reasserts itself. *Naturam expellas furca tamen usque recurret*. Only a short time since I saw *The Rivals*, *The School for Scandal* and *She Stoops to Conquer*, all equally adequately acted, and was struck—as the audience also obviously was—by the naturalness of Goldsmith's comedy compared with the artificiality of Sheridan's masterpieces. Indeed from *The Rivals* the Faulkland and Julia episode had to be eliminated to float the piece; while even *The School for Scandal*, in spite of all its amazing cleverness, or rather, perhaps, because of its preternatural cleverness, was unconvincing and fell a little flat. For in *The School for Scandal* Sheridan went farther back than the sentimental Steele for his inspiration, went back to the artificial comedy of the Restoration, where everything is as meretricious as its morals. But in *She Stoops to Conquer* as in everything else he has written, Goldsmith went back straight to Nature and therefore the comedy seems to us natural still to-day.

“To me more dear, congenial to my heart,
One native charm than all the gloss of art.”

CHAPTER XXII

"AS A HARE WHOM HOUNDS AND HORNS PURSUE"

"THE insults to which Goldsmith had to submit," says Thackeray, "are shocking to read of—slander, contumely, vulgar satire, brutal malignity perverting his commonest motives and actions. He had his share of these, and one's anger is roused at reading of them, as at seeing a woman insulted or a child assaulted, at a notion that a creature so very gentle and weak and full of love should have had to suffer so." In those days there were professional libellers in the Press who made a living out of the profession. Creatures with the instinct of the sphex wasp to sting at the paralysing spot in order to make a meal of its helpless victim. "Attacks upon private character," says Mr Forster, "were then the most liberal existing source of newspaper income," and of these Goldsmith was made the target more and more as he became more and more conspicuous. His crowning triumph, the success of *She Stoops to Conquer*, naturally provoked a host of these Press Thugs—"It is the bright day that brings forth the adder"—and I am going to dwell for a little upon the most venomous of these attacks for more than one reason. It may serve, in the first place, as a specimen of the kind of attack to which the gentlest, most generous and most sensitive of men was specially subjected just because he was gentle

and generous and sensitive, because he could be stung but would not sting, because, to quote once more the servile words of Macaulay, "he forgave injuries so readily that he might be said to invite them." But, in the second place, this attack is worth singling out for particular notice because both it and its consequences helped so much to embitter the last year of the poor poet's harrowed life. Little more than a week after the first triumphant presentation of *She Stoops to Conquer* there appeared in *The London Packet* the following letter, with the motto, "*Vous vous noyez par vanité*," addressed to "Dr Goldsmith":—

"SIR,—The happy knack which you have learnt of puffing your own compositions provokes me to come forth. You have not been the editor of newspapers and magazines not to discover the trick of literary *humbug*. But the gauze is so thin that the very foolish part of the world see through it and discover the doctor's monkey face and cloven foot. Your poetic vanity is as unpardonable as your personal ; would man believe it, and will woman bear it to be told that for hours the *great* Goldsmith will stand surveying his grotesque orang-outang's figure in a pier-glass? Was but the lovely H—k as much enamoured you would not sigh, my gentle swain, in vain. But your vanity is preposterous. How will this same bard of Bedlam ring the changes in praise of Goldy! But what has he to be either proud or vain of? *The Traveller* is a flimsy poem built upon false principles—principles diametrically opposite to liberty. What is the *Good-Natured Man* but a poor water-gruel dramatic dose? What is the

Deserted Village but a *pretty* poem of easy numbers without fancy, dignity, genius or fire? And pray what may be the last *speaking pantomime*, so praised by the doctor himself, but an incoherent piece of stuff, the figure of a woman with a fish's tail, without plot, incident or intrigue? We are made to laugh at stale, dull jokes, wherein we mistake pleasantry for wit, and grimace for humour: wherein every scene is unnatural and inconsistent with the rules, the laws of nature and of drama, viz.: Two gentlemen come to a man of fortune's house, eat, drink, sleep, etc., and take it for an inn. The one is intended as a lover to the daughter. He talks with her for some hours and, when he sees her again in a different dress, he treats her as a bar-girl and swears she squinted. He abuses the master of the house and threatens to kick him out of his own doors. The Squire, whom we are told is to be a fool, proves the most sensible being of the piece; and he makes out a whole act by bidding his mother lie close behind a bush, persuading her that his father, her own husband, is a highwayman and that he has come to cut their throats; and to give his cousin an opportunity to go off, he drives his mother over hedges, ditches and through ponds. There is not, sweet suckling Johnson, a natural stroke in the whole play but the young fellow giving the stolen jewels to the mother, supposing her to be the landlady. That Mr Colman did no justice to this piece I honestly allow; that he told all his friends it would be damned I positively aver; and from such ungenerous insinuations without dramatic merit it rose to public notice and it is now the *ton* to go and see it, though I never saw a person that either liked it or approved

it any more than the absurd plot of Mr Home's tragedy of *Alonzo*. Mr Goldsmith, correct your arrogance, reduce your vanity, and endeavour to believe as a man, you are of the plainest sort, and, as an author, but a mortal piece of mediocrity.

“ ‘Brise le Miroir infidele
Qui vous cache la vérité.’

“ ‘TOM TICKLE’ ? ”

This scurrilous letter of that noisome skunk, Kenrick, would be beneath notice, even the notice of the super-sensitive Goldsmith, but for the offensive allusion to Miss Horneck, which gave deep pain to the lady and seemed to the poet to threaten to disturb or even destroy the friendly relations with a family where he had found the only home he had known since he quitted Ireland.

Now what was a chivalrous Irishman of Goldsmith's temper and temperament, “irascible as a hornet” and exquisitely sensitive, to do to avenge this insult to a lady who had honoured him with her friendship? There was no other redress open than personal chastisement of the creature responsible for the letter or for the appearance of the letter in *The London Packet*. As the letter was anonymous Goldsmith hurried off with a friend, probably Captain Higgins, to the office of the paper. Here he mistook the publisher of the paper for the editor and proceeded to inflict the personal chastisement on him. But alas! when you come down to a mere brute conflict the brute has the advantage over the man, and the sturdy publisher was much more than a physical match for the undersized and enfeebled poet. Goldsmith got the worst of the

degrading scuffle that ensued, and, to crown his mortification, Kenrick, issuing at that moment from the editor's room, intervened to separate the combatants and to send the discomfited and disfigured poet home in a coach.

Even if you get the better of a wrestle with a sweep there is little glory in the victory ; but if you get the worst of it ! The poor poet was pilloried in all the papers, which naturally took the side of their contemporary. In those days in England, as to-day in America, papers depended to a great extent for their interest and for their circulation upon personal gossip, scandal and slander. When a lady said to Sam Rogers, who had a tongue like a sword and the poison of asps under his lips, " I hear, Mr Rogers, you are always saying ill-natured things." " Well, you see, ma'am," piped Rogers, " I have a very weak voice, and, if I did not say ill-natured things, no one would hear me ! " In the Press, as in Society, it is the ill-natured things which get the largest circulation, and naturally therefore in those days the other papers regarded the letter in *The London Packet* as good business and took its side against the sorely-tried poet.

Then Thomas Evans, the assaulted publisher, not satisfied with his physical victory, indicted Goldsmith for the assault and would condescend to a compromise only on condition of the poet's paying fifty pounds to a Welsh charity.

Finally, Goldsmith's dear friends in the Club made themselves more merry even than usual over his discomfiture. Even Johnson enjoyed it ! " I fancy, sir," said Boswell, upon the appearance of what Johnson called Goldsmith's " manifesto " in the *London Chronicle*, " I fancy, sir, this is the first time that Goldsmith

has been engaged in such an adventure." "Why, sir," replied Johnson, "I believe it is the first time he has *beat*; he may have *been beaten* before. This, sir, is a new plume to him."

It is at least pleasant to find that Johnson supposed Goldsmith to have had the best of the scuffle, whereas the poet's sympathetic friend, Craddock, leaves you in no doubt that the sturdy Welshman had the best of it. I cannot see why Johnson should make merry over the encounter—allowing Goldsmith's provocation to have been adequate—since he himself was prepared to meet with a cudgel "Ossian" Macpherson's threatened physical onslaught and also the threatened moral onslaught of that black-mail bully and blackguard, Foote. Nor, again, can I see why Johnson should ridicule Goldsmith's "manifesto" as more presumptuous or uncalled-for than his own letter to Lord Chesterfield, which he was at pains to transcribe for the admiration of posterity. The neglect of a single author by a single private patron, like Lord Chesterfield, was an incomparably less public evil than the libellous licence of the Press, while Goldsmith's grievance against the Press was an incomparably grosser private injury than that which Johnson revenged in his famous letter. With all my admiration for this famous letter I cannot help saying that Boswell paid Johnson too high a compliment in crediting him with the composition of Goldsmith's dignified protest. "Goldsmith's apology," says Boswell, "was written so much in Dr Johnson's manner that both Mrs Williams and I supposed it to be his; but when he came home he soon undeceived us. When he said to Mrs Williams, 'Well, Dr Goldsmith's *manifesto* has got into your paper,' I asked him if Dr Goldsmith had written it,

with an air that made him see I suspected it was his, though subscribed by Goldsmith. ‘Sir,’ replied Johnson, ‘Dr Goldsmith would no more have asked me to write such a thing as that for him than he would have asked me to feed him with a spoon or do anything else that denoted his imbecility. . . . Sir, had he shown it to any one friend he would not have been allowed to publish it. He has, indeed, done it very well; but it is a foolish thing well done. I suppose he has been so much elated with the success of his new comedy that he has thought everything that concerned him must be of importance to the public.’”

This is well worth quoting as characteristic of the whole tone of Johnson and *a fortiori* of the Club generally towards Goldsmith. If any other prominent member of the Club had been as unanimously and indecently attacked by the Press and had made the following public-spirited protest, would Johnson have considered it uncalled for and conceited?

“Lest it should be supposed that I have been willing to correct in others an abuse of which I have been guilty myself, I beg leave to declare that in all my life I never wrote or dictated a single paragraph, letter or essay in a newspaper, except a few moral essays under the character of a Chinese about ten years ago in the *Ledger* and a letter to which I signed my name in the *St James Chronicle*. If the liberty of the Press, therefore, has been abused I have had no hand in it.

“I have always considered the Press as the protector of our freedom, as a watchful guardian capable of uniting the weak against the encroachments of power. What concerns the public most properly admits of a

public discussion ; but of late the Press has turned from defending public interest to making inroads upon private life, from combating the strong to overwhelming the feeble. No condition is now too obscure for its abuse and the protector has become the tyrant of the people. In this manner the freedom of the Press is beginning to sow the seeds of its own dissolution ; the great must oppose it from principle and the weak from fear, till at last every rank of mankind shall be found to give up its benefits, content with security from its insults.

“ How to put a stop to this licentiousness, by which all are indiscriminately abused and by which vice consequently escapes in the general censure, I am unable to tell. All I could wish is, that as the law gives us no protection against the injury, so it should give calumniators no shelter after having provoked correction. The insults which we receive before the public by being more open are the more distressing ; by treating them with silent contempt we do not pay a sufficient deference to the opinion of the world. By recurring to legal redress we too often expose the weakness of the law which only serves to increase our mortification by failing to relieve us. In short, every man should singly consider himself as the guardian of the liberty of the Press, and, as far as his influence can extend, should endeavour to prevent its licentiousness becoming at last the grave of its freedom.

“OLIVER GOLDSMITH.”

What is there personal in this letter to make it self-important and presumptuous ? Only its opening text and occasion. For the rest, the letter is written impersonally in the public interest to protest against

an abuse of the Press which in that day by universal admission cried aloud for abatement. No doubt the provocation to the letter was personal, but as all the papers were in full cry at the moment against Goldsmith, it had ceased to be private. In truth, to us who can see things at this distance in their true perspective, Goldsmith made rather too little than too much of himself by taking notice of such scurrilous attacks at all. That Johnson should consider the letter consequential shows of what slight consequence even he held either Goldsmith himself or his grievances; and as it was to Johnson the sensitive poet usually turned "in all his griefs—and God had given his share," he must have felt himself friendless now when he most of all needed a sympathetic friend.

For Kenrick's scurrilous attack was made at a moment when Goldsmith, so far from being, as Johnson suggested, intoxicated with his triumphs was distraught with his desperate difficulties. It was not, in fact, his sense of his own importance which made him so sensitive, and irritable through his sensitiveness, but his sense of his crowding and crushing liabilities. These worries made him vulnerable as a shellless crab to such an attack as Kenrick's; while the attack itself and its consequences—his discomfiture, the ridicule of his Club friends and the universal abuse of the Press—tortured him yet more insupportably. That a letter wrung from him under these provocations should be so little personal and petulant, should be, on the contrary, so measured, judicial, impersonal and public-spirited is surprising, and would have surprised Johnson if he had had an idea of Goldsmith's sensitiveness, of his desperate

circumstances and of his miserable consciousness that they were desperate. Of none of these, least of all of the last of these—that Goldsmith had lost his sheet anchor, his “knack at hoping”—had Johnson an adequate idea. For Goldsmith in these days was more regular than ever in his attendance at the Club, where he hoped to escape from his miserable self—in vain. For in the Club he found himself more solitary than in his solitary home. “Little do men perceive,” says Bacon, “what solitude is and how far it extends; for a crowd is not company, and faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk but a tinkling cymbal where there is no love. The Latin adage meeteth with it a little: ‘*Magna civitas magna solitudo.*’” This little book has been written to small purpose if it has not suggested to the reader that Goldsmith found himself in London generally, but particularly in the Club, in uncongenial society, and he would necessarily feel this uncongeniality most when he was most miserable. When you are miserable you not only need sympathy most and long most for it, but are also most sensitive to such whips and scorns, snubs, slights and insults as Goldsmith had to take patiently from the unworthy both in and out of the Club in these last distracted days of his lonely life.

CHAPTER XXIII

"RETREAT FROM CARE THAT NEVER MUST BE MINE"

"HOPE," says Prior, quoting consciously or unconsciously a saying ascribed to more than one great Greek, "is but the dream of those awake"; and up to now Goldsmith had not only lived himself, but had also hypnotised his publishers into living in these waking dreams. He had got from these printers advance after advance upon projected publications, and had thus squandered his credit with them as recklessly as he had squandered the over-drafts themselves which they had honoured. He lost faith in himself with their loss of faith in him, and at a time when he most needed his buoyancy of spirit. He had to do the most depressing work—mere compilation—under the most depressing conditions—those of paying for eaten bread. Schopenhauer compares the illusions by which we are led on in life, and led on even to live, to the bunch of hay which an Italian donkey-driver ties at the end of the cart pole, the hope of which helps the weariest beast to drag the heaviest load over the roughest ground and on the hottest day. But when, as in Goldsmith's case, the hay has been already eaten, then the only stimulus are the blows and curses of the exasperated driver.

Indeed by this the booksellers, who had employed and paid the poet in advance, had become so ex-

asperated that they declined to entertain perhaps the most promising of all Goldsmith's pot-boiling proposals. He proposed to edit a *Popular Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, and to secure for it contributions from all the leading experts of the day. Though, however, he had promises of contributions from such men as Johnson, Burke, Reynolds, Burney, etc., the booksellers declined to embark on the undertaking on grounds which Tom Davies, their representative, states at length in his *Life of Garrick*. They did not, he says, distrust the abilities either of Goldsmith himself or of his proposed coadjutors, but they did distrust the doctor's business capacity. The proposed Dictionary was too big a work to be entrusted to an editor so easy-going, unreliable and procrastinating, who had already exhausted the faith of the trade in him by other plausible proposals which had secured him advances only to be spent before the work contracted for was even begun.

Goldsmith, however, assured that a bill backed by such solvent names as those of Burke, Johnson and Reynolds would be accepted by the trade, was at pains to write what he thought, and what Craddock thought, one of his best bits of prose as an introduction to the projected Dictionary. Bishop Percy, too, supposed that the trade had fallen in with so promising a proposal as the following extract from the *Percy Memoir* shows, which shows also—and it is for this reason that I quote it—how the poor poet was as reckless in the dissipation of his health as he was in all other economies :—

"Goldsmith had engaged all his literary friends and the members of the Club to contribute articles, each on the subject in which he excelled ; so that

it could not but have contained a great assemblage of excellent disquisitions. He accordingly had prepared a Prospectus in which, as usual, he gave a luminous view of his design; but his death unfortunately prevented the execution of the work. He was subject to severe fits of the strangury, owing probably to the intemperate manner in which he confined himself to the desk when he was employed in his compilations—often indeed for several weeks successively without taking exercise. On such occasions he usually hired lodgings in some farmhouse a few miles from London and wrote there without cessation till he had finished his task. He then carried his copy to the bookseller, received his compensation and gave himself up, perhaps for months without interruption, to the gaieties, amusements and societies of London.”

Such a life is soon ended. Weeks of continuous and intense sedentary work, alternating with weeks of such London dissipation and accompanied by that corroding cancer of the mind—worry—might well have undermined a stronger constitution than Goldsmith's. Worry itself is like a tumour into which everything else that is wrong in the body settles, exasperating it and being exasperated by it. I say this in extenuation of some petulant outbreaks recorded about this time of Goldsmith. A man who is at peace with himself may well be at peace with all men; while the quarrelsome man usually is he that has his first and chief quarrel with himself.

In judging, then, these outbreaks of Goldsmith's which Boswell and others have recorded, we should keep in mind not only the provocation, which was often exasperating, but also the state of exaspera-

tion to which ill-health and work and worry had brought the poet. The whole quarrel between Brutus and Cassius is explained at the close of the scene when Brutus says:—

“O Cassius, I am sick of many griefs.
Portia is dead.”

And Cassius exclaims,

“How 'scaped I killing when I crossed you so?”

The occasion even of a life-long quarrel with a friend is often not its cause, since this had to do with someone or something else that had fretted him an hour before into irritability.

May I take in illustration the momentary quarrel between Johnson and Goldsmith which occurred at this time and has with many readers of Boswell discredited the sensitive poet. At a party at Messrs Dilly, the booksellers, where amongst the fellow-guests of Johnson and Goldsmith were a dissenting minister, Dr Mayo, and the evangelical hymn-writer, Toplady, Boswell, with his usual tactful felicity, started of all subjects that of toleration. Johnson thundering intolerantly on toleration sounds in our ears to-day rather like St Anthony Absolute furiously asserting his calmness. That he should have been heard as patiently as he was speaks eloquently for the Christian spirit of Dr Mayo, who never lost his temper even under such taunts—as unjust as they were unprovoked—as this: “Dr Mayo,” says Johnson, “like other champions for unlimited toleration, has got a set of words.” Goldsmith also was trampled upon with as little consideration and as little justice. “Our first reformers,” began Goldsmith, “who were burnt for not believing bread and wine

to be Christ—” “Sir,” shouted Johnson in interruption, “they were not burnt for not believing bread and wine to be Christ, but for insulting those that did believe it.” An odd defence, certainly, of the Inquisition! Whatever may be said for the torture of a single heretic for a few minutes by burning him alive in order to prevent the spread of a heresy which would involve the burning alive for all eternity of thousands, there is nothing to be said for a Christian’s avenging an insult to his faith by the stake. Goldsmith was thus not only summarily but permanently silenced, while the argument thundered on if, indeed, it could be called an argument. “*Si pugna est, ubi tu pulsas, ego vapulo tantum.*” Here, however, is Boswell’s account of the affair:—

“During this argument Goldsmith sat in restless agitation from a wish to get in and *shine*. Finding himself excluded, he had taken his hat to go away, but remained for some time with it in his hand, like a gamester who, at the close of a long night, lingers for a little while to see if he can have a favourable opening to finish with success. Once when he was beginning to speak he found himself overpowered by the loud voice of Johnson, who was at the opposite end of the table and did not perceive Goldsmith’s attempt. Thus disappointed of the wish to obtain the attention of the company, Goldsmith in a passion threw down his hat, looking angrily at Johnson and exclaiming in a bitter tone, ‘*Take it!*’ When Toplady was going to speak, Johnson uttered some sound which led Goldsmith to think that he was beginning again and taking the words from Toplady. Upon which he seized this opportunity of venting his own envy and spleen under the pretext of supporting

another person. 'Sir,' said he to Johnson, 'the gentleman has heard you patiently for an hour; pray allow us now to hear him.' Johnson (sternly), 'Sir, I was not interrupting the gentleman. I was only giving him a signal of my attention. Sir, you are impertinent.' Goldsmith made no reply, but continued in the company for some time."

That is worth quoting if only as a not unfair specimen of the kind of Boswellian comment which has so discredited Goldsmith. Would Boswell have charged any other member of the company with "a wish to *shine*," because he desired to contribute to the discussion, or with "envy and spleen" because he resented the gross rudeness with which he was excluded? What, again, would Boswell have said if it had been Goldsmith who had thundered away for an hour in justification of persecution, and if it had been Johnson who was snubbed and suppressed by such a preposterous "Poor Poll" contradiction as, "Sir, they were not burnt for not believing bread and wine to be Christ, but for insulting those who did believe it"? On whose side, too, is the balance of impertinence in the discussion as Boswell reports it? That in *Doctor Major* "is but a choleric word" which in *Doctor Minor* "is flat blasphemy." Boswell certainly would never have struck the balance as Johnson himself magnanimously did a little later at the Club.

"Johnson, Mr Langton and I went together to the Club, where we found Mr Burke, Mr Garrick and some other members, and amongst them our friend Goldsmith, who sat silently brooding over Johnson's reprimand to him after dinner. Johnson perceived this and said aside to some of us, 'I'll make Gold-

smith forgive me’; and then called to him in a loud voice, ‘Dr Goldsmith, something passed to-day where you and I dined: I ask your pardon.’ Goldsmith answered placidly, ‘It must be much from you, sir, that I take ill.’ And so at once the difference was over and they were on as easy terms as ever, and Goldsmith rattled away as usual.”

What, however, probably strikes most readers in this report of the dinner at Dilly’s is Goldsmith’s child-like attitude and childish petulance as he stands hesitating, hat in hand, at the door, in the hope of being allowed to get a word in, and his flinging down his hat in a passion when that hope had gone exclaiming pettishly, “*Take it!*” It seems ludicrously, and perhaps to a cynical reader despicably, childish; but to readers who realise Goldsmith’s state at this time—state of health, of circumstances and of mind—the irritable outburst will seem rather pathetic than laughable. Usually Goldsmith forgave and forgot immediately even Johnson’s sledge-hammer snubs, and if he now brooded over this one miserably and for hours, it was only because he was now so miserable in himself. And if, after the reconciliation, he seemed to Boswell to rattle away as light-heartedly as usual, it was all on the surface. As his countrymen, Cooke and Glover, who knew and shared his Irish temperament, testified, he would hurry away from such a scene to his lonely home, only to brood miserably over his desperate circumstances. At home his two servants, John Eyles and Mary Ginger, noted now in their kind and considerate master a sad change of temper. He was irritable, impatient and passionate, but, they added, so penitent for his outbursts that they used to quarrel as to which of

the two should be the first to fall in his way immediately afterwards since he was sure to express his penitence practically by a generous tip.

The fact is Goldsmith's past life had at last come up with him. The privations he had suffered when he tramped the Continent and when he lived in London amongst the beggars in Axe Lane, the alternation of weeks of intense and continuous sedentary work with weeks of dissipation, and the exhaustion of his credit with exasperated booksellers to whom he had pledged his over-worked brain for years in advance, all these helped to undermine a constitution never robust, and left him a sensitive prey to a host of worries and an easy prey to illness and death. Perhaps the pension, which his friends sought to secure for him, might have so lightened his troubles as to have lengthened his life; but pensions in these days were paid usually for services rather to politics than to literature. No doubt Wedderburne, in defending Johnson's pension against Tommy Townshend, had spoken of the magnanimous intention of the ministry henceforth to extend the bounty of the crown to other and worthier writers than mere political pamphleteers—to writers who had the double claim of need and of literary distinction—yet though no one was more eligible on both grounds than Goldsmith, the application for a pension to him was decidedly refused. It was granted to such immortal writers as Arthur Murphy, Hugh Kelly and Shebbeare, and for such immortal writings as Beattie's *Essay on Truth*; but the author of *The Vicar of Wakefield* was sent empty away. The grant to Beattie was a double mortification to Goldsmith as it was invidiously made at the time when that for

the poet had been refused, and also when the Scotch Professor's shallow and pretentious answer to Voltaire and to Hume was extravagantly praised as superior to anything in prose the Irishman had written. “Here's such a stir,” said Goldsmith, “about a fellow that has written one book and I have written many.” “Ah, Doctor,” retorted Johnson, “there goes two-and-forty sixpences, you know, to one guinea.”

What is a contemporary's judgment on a contemporary worth when Johnson could think the *Essay on Truth* a masterpiece, and when Reynolds could paint Beattie with the *Essay on Truth* under his arm and the angel of Truth by his side driving away the fiend of falsehood represented by the figure of Hume, that of sophistry represented by the face of Voltaire, and that of infidelity personated by the obese Gibbon! “It very ill becomes a man of your eminence and character,” said Goldsmith to Reynolds, “to debase so high a genius as Voltaire before so mean a writer as Beattie. Beattie and his book will be forgotten in ten years, while Voltaire's fame will last for ever. Take care it does not perpetuate this picture to the shame of such a man as you.”

To be sure, Beattie's pose as *fidei defensor* went far to overcome Johnson's anti-Scotch prejudice, while his being a Scotsman went far to securing him a pension in these days of Lord Bute. It was not, however, only the orthodox and the Scotch that hailed Beattie as a new star of the first magnitude, but also the Club, and indeed all London Society. Hence when Goldsmith ventured to estimate the *Essay on Truth* as every reader of to-day would estimate it, he was universally hooted down as ill-conditioned and envious. “Everyone,” said Mrs Thrale, “loves Dr

Beattie but Goldsmith, who says he cannot bear the sight of so much applause as we all bestow upon him. Did he not tell us so himself, who could believe he was so amazingly ill-natured?" Of course Goldsmith's ill-health and embarrassed circumstances, his disgust with his dearest friends, Johnson and Reynolds' extravagant appreciation of Beattie, and his disappointment that the *Essay on Truth* should be rewarded with a pension which all his own work could not secure, edged his criticism of the Scotch Professor with a bitterness which seemed wholly envious. He *was* envious and confessed it, but it was the confession, not the envy, which was peculiar to him. It is true that when even Boswell admitted that "Goldsmith had not more of this vice than other people have, but only talked of it freely," Johnson contended that his talking of it freely showed "that he had such a superabundance of the odious quality that he cannot keep it within his own breast, but it boils over." But you should take this outburst of Johnson's with its provocation in order to weigh what it's worth. It must always be remembered in reading Boswell's *Life of Johnson* that the biographer was for ever setting his friends by the ears, rather out of meddlesomeness than out of mischievousness. Again and again he reminds you of the boy at school who is for ever trying to get up a fight between two of his school-fellows by first provoking and then repeating to each in turn something irritating said by the other. Having a special jealousy of Goldsmith's favour with Johnson, he was specially given to provoking and then repeating to each something to his disparagement said by the other.

Now, when it is remembered that Goldsmith was the least discreet of men, and again, that the most

discreet of men will at times say something of his dearest friend which, if repeated, would enrage him irreconcilably, the wonder is that the tale-bearing Boswell had not exasperated Johnson into saying harsher things of Goldsmith than any of those he has recorded. Goldsmith, who, as *Retaliation* shows, had a singularly shrewd judgment of men, had taken Johnson's measure, knew at once his powers and his limitations better than any man, except Burke, in the Club, and when, therefore, Boswell would designedly provoke him by the extravagance of his praise of Johnson's powers, Goldsmith would naturally urge his limitations. When, *e.g.*, Boswell, being about to return to Scotland, paid a farewell visit—a final farewell as it turned out—to Goldsmith, and proceeded as usual to launch out into hyperbolical eulogy of Johnson, he says, “The jealousy and envy of Goldsmith, which, though possessed of many most amiable qualities, he frankly avowed, broke out violently at this interview. . . . He now seemed very angry that Johnson was going to be a traveller ; said he would be a dead weight for me to carry and that I should never be able to lug him along through the Highlands and Hebrides.” Nor would he patiently allow me to enlarge upon Johnson's wonderful abilities, but exclaimed, “Is he like Burke, who winds into a subject like a serpent ?” “But,” said I, “Johnson is the Hercules who strangled serpents in his cradle.” By the way, I know nothing more characteristic of the fatuity of Boswell than that he should print this retort years after he had uttered it, under the impression that it was relevant, happy and crushing. Compared with it the oft-quoted exhortation of that Sheffield clerical magistrate, Alderson, to a criminal

brought before him, is relevance itself:—"John, John! This is sad indeed! God Almighty has given you health and strength, instead of which you go about stealing ducks!" But to return: Boswell, having irritated Goldsmith into disparagement of Johnson, hurries always straight away to Johnson to repeat a conversation in which the poet plays the part of *Advocatus Diaboli* and himself that of *Advocatus Dei* to his idol.

Keeping this in mind—and it should be continually kept in mind in reading Boswell—the wonder is not that Johnson was provoked into saying from time to time harsh and unjust things of Goldsmith, which the jealousy of Boswell eagerly recorded, but that the friendship between the two writers remained to the close unbroken and even uninterrupted. That Goldsmith's affection should have been proof against all the snubs he received in public from Johnson is to the credit of his sweetness of nature; but it is to the credit of Johnson's magnanimity that his reciprocal affection should have survived Boswell's repetition to him in cold blood of the poet's petulant outbursts. No doubt Boswell was by universal admission what Johnson called him, a "clubbable man," but his very sociability was, so to say, disintegrating, since he would stimulate conversation by reporting personal remarks to the person they concerned. Goldsmith, whose tongue hung by a hair-trigger, and for whom Boswell had a jealous dislike, suffered more than any other member of the club from this busybody, who fertilised discord as bees fertilise flowers. And not between Johnson and Goldsmith only. I have little doubt that much of the prejudice of Garrick, *e.g.*, against Goldsmith, was due to Boswell's report to him of some

of the outbursts of the dramatist when under harrow of the manager. Yet it was to Garrick, now that the booksellers declined to float *The Popular Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, that Goldsmith had, in his desperate straits, to appeal for assistance. Mr Forster prints the following letter from him to the manager of Drury Lane, and its ungrammatical incoherence and shaky signature—of which he gives a facsimile—indicate pathetically the distraction in which it was written :—

“MY DEAR SIR,—Your saying you would play my *Good-Natured Man* makes me wish it. The money you advanced me upon Newbery’s note I have the mortification to find is not yet paid, but he says he will in two or three days. What I mean by this letter is to lend me sixty pound for which I will give you Newbery’s note, so that the whole of my debt will be an hundred for which you shall have Newbery’s note as a security. This may be paid either from my alteration if my benefit should come to so much, but at any rate I will take care you shall not be a loser. I will give you a new character in my comedy and knock out Lofty which does not do and will make such other alterations as you direct.
—I am, yours, OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

“I beg an answer.”

Garrick is hardly perhaps to be blamed for endorsing this letter, “Goldsmith’s parlaver” (*sic*), while he is certainly to be praised for offering the loan asked for on Goldsmith’s own acceptance. But this loan was but as a straw grasped at by a drowning man who felt himself sinking hopelessly in deep waters where no ground was. Even the spiteful

Beauclerk would have rather pitied than scorned Goldsmith in these days if he had guessed the real cause of his wretchedness. "We have a new comedy here," writes Beauclerk to Lord Charlemont, "which is good for nothing. Bad as it is, however, it succeeds very well, and has almost killed Goldsmith with envy." And these fits of gloom alternated with forced and feverish outbursts of apparent gaiety with the Hornecks at Barton, or with Sir Joshua at Vauxhall, or at Beauclerk's house, where he played the buffoon with Garrick, recalling those lines of Metastasio :—

" If each man's deeply hidden woe
Were written out upon his brow,
For many then our tears would flow
Who rather move our envy now.

Alas ! how many in whose breast
The keenest agonies exist,
Make in appearing to be blest,
Their sum of happiness consist."

More sympathetic friends than Beauclerk, however, saw how it was in these days with Goldsmith. Sir Joshua noticed his occasional distraction of manner in the midst of his forced gaiety and his abrupt departure even from the most congenial company to brood alone over his troubles. Craddock, too, noted how painfully Goldsmith was altered—his cheerfulness, when he was cheerful, all forced and spasmodic. Craddock could not rekindle even a spark of hope in a breast which once was all hopefulness. To his suggestion that a subscription edition of *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*—if the holders of the copyrights would consent to it—might bring in a substantial sum, Goldsmith replied listlessly, " Pray, do what you

please with them.” And when Craddock insisted upon the poet’s dining with his wife and himself on the day before their return to Leicestershire, Goldsmith replied, “I will ; but on one condition—that you will not ask me to eat anything.” “In the course of the evening,” writes Craddock, in recalling this dismal dinner, “Goldsmith endeavoured to talk and remark as usual, but all was forced.”

While Beauclerk was writing to Lord Charlemont, expressing his delight in the success of a new and bad play *because* it had almost killed Goldsmith with envy, two of the poet’s humblest creditors, milliners, the Misses Gun, made this appeal to Craddock, “Oh, sir, sooner persuade Mr Goldsmith to let us work for him *gratis* than suffer him to apply to any other. We are sure that he will pay us if he can.” Which understood Goldsmith better ?

CHAPTER XXIV

"RETALIATION"

WHAT struck me most in a recently-published *Life of Foote* was the servile obsequiousness of Garrick to this unscrupulous mimic who repaid his many and deep obligations, both professional and pecuniary, to the actor with scurrilous abuse. Foote never had a kind word, or any other than a libellous word, for Garrick (whose candid friends kept him well-informed of the libels), yet the more abusive the mimic became the more obsequious and obliging he found the actor. The fact is there was something more to fear—and which Garrick feared more—from Foote than private libel—public mimicry—and the dread of this kept the actor fawning at the mimic's heel.

On the other hand, from Goldsmith, who seldom said and never did an unkind thing, Garrick had, or thought that he had, nothing to fear, and therefore he ridiculed him relentlessly. But sometimes the long-bullied boy at school turns upon his tormentor and thrashes him once, but once for all, into good behaviour. Thackeray told a dear old friend of mine, a daughter of Ingoldsby, how his nose came to be broken at the Charterhouse, how it became the permanent disfigurement it was, and how he avenged the outrage. It had been broken accidentally by his life-long friend, Venables—the original of George Warrington—but

it was so skilfully set that it would have been no disfigurement had not a big bully bound Thackeray helplessly to a tree and then deliberately and hopelessly smashed it in. “ I grew big enough and strong enough,” said Thackeray afterwards to my old friend, “ to give that young ruffian the soundest thrashing a boy ever got ! ”

Garrick also, having ridiculed and browbeaten Goldsmith for years, succeeded at last in inflicting upon him the permanent disfigurement of the epitaph :—

“ Here lies Nolly Goldsmith, for shortness called Noll,
Who wrote like an angel ; but talked like poor Poll.”

And Goldsmith, like Thackeray with his school-mate bully, turned at last upon his tormentor and inflicted upon him—no brutal bludgeoning certainly, because it was not in the poet’s nature to be brutal—but such a correction, at once kindly and caustic, as must have taught the actor manners for the future, if there had been a future before the dying poet.

I have quoted Garrick’s epitaph because it alone has survived and alone probably deserved to survive, of all the epitaphs which occasioned Goldsmith’s *Retaliation*. All the others that pretended to have preceded and provoked it were after-thoughts and second thoughts—thoughts chastened by the sobering reflection that their long-suffering victim could and would at last strike back with a wholly unlooked-for spirit, science and effect.

But the original epitaphs of Goldsmith’s Club friends, extemporised upon him at one meeting in his absence in ridicule “ of his country, dialect and

person," and read out in his presence at their next meeting, may safely be presumed to have had the spite without the wit of Garrick's. Goldsmith seemed then to be a helpless, harmless butt. The empty hat, to borrow an apt American image, which irresistibly tempted a kick as it lay in the roadway, had not yet had slipped under it the stone which would make the kicker rue his sportiveness. Then, again, Goldsmith's manner had become so strange and distraught of late, and his sensitiveness had of late become so much more shrinking and acute that he tempted more than ever his tormentors. They came round about him like bees :—

"Like flies that haunt a wound, or deer, or men,
Or almost all that is, hurting the hurt."

From the account Cumberland gives of the evening when these biting epitaphs were read out (and Sir Fretful Plagiary was not a sympathetic person, and least of all sympathetic towards his rival playwright) Goldsmith was cruelly hurt, hurt so evidently that even Cumberland himself was moved to mercy, which he says he showed in letting the poet down as gently as possible in his own contribution to these *jeux d'esprit*.

Taking, then, Garrick's epitaph as a specimen at least of the spite of these productions, and remembering that they were but the crown and climax of a long series of such gibes, and remembering also and above all Goldsmith's even morbid sensitiveness, especially in these last days, to slights and snubs, whips and scorns of the kind, you would expect the poet's retort to these cumulative insolences to be as tart as its provocation. But nothing could sour the

milk of human kindness in the breast of the author of *The Vicar of Wakefield*. However “irascible” Goldsmith may have been, he was the reverse of rancorous. However hurt or angered at the moment, in an hour his sweetness of nature dissipated the sense of injury, as the warmth of the sun dissolves the cloud which had obscured it, and he is eager to find something admirable in the man who would see in him only the ridiculous.

But the kindliness of Goldsmith’s *Retaliation*—its provocation being considered—is not so notable even as its shrewdness. This man, whom everyone more or less misjudged, took everyone’s measure precisely. As he had estimated Beattie at his true value, when he was universally hailed as the *Malleus Hereticorum* of the age, so he estimated at his true value Burke, when as yet he was a mere Irish adventurer, and when abilities, which according to Lord Acton, Dollinger and Montalembert rank Burke as “the greatest Englishman after Shakespeare,” were as yet wholly unrecognised. “We then spoke of *Retaliation*—I am quoting from Hazlitt’s *Conversations of Northcote*—and praised the character of Burke in particular as a masterpiece. Nothing that he had ever said or done but what was foretold in it; nor was he painted as the principal figure in the foreground with the partiality of a friend, or as the great man of the day, but with a background of history, showing both what he was and what he might have been.” Only less admirable because it was less prophetic is the character of Garrick, whose strength and weakness are hit off with a touch at once light and sure, and as sympathetic as it is masterly.

Here is the prophetic portrait of Burke :—

“ Here lies our good Edmund, whose genius was such,
 We scarcely can praise it or blame it too much ;
 Who, born for the universe, narrowed his mind,
 And to party gave up what was meant for mankind.
 Though fraught with all learning, still straining his throat
 To persuade Tommy Townshend to give him his vote.
 Who, too deep for his hearers, still went on refining,
 And thought of convincing, while they thought of dining.
 Though equal to all things, for all things unfit,
 Too nice for a statesman, too proud for a wit :
 For a patriot too cool ; for a drudge disobedient ;
 And too fond of the right to pursue the expedient.
 In short 'twas his fate, unemployed or in place, sir,
 To eat mutton cold and cut blocks with a razor.”

If Burke was to be “ bounded in a nut-shell”—if his genius, the prostitution of his genius and the paltry party rewards of this prostitution, were to be expressed epigrammatically—I cannot see how they could be more adequately, aptly and compactly put than in this thumb-nail sketch.

In the portrait of Garrick, too, every line tells, and the picture, on the whole, so far from being, as it might well have been, vindictively coloured, has all its shadows softened :—

“ Here lies David Garrick, describe me who can,
 An abridgment of all that was pleasant in man ;
 As an actor, confessed without rival to shine ;
 As a wit, if not first, in the very first line.
 Yet with talents like these and an excellent heart,
 The man had his failings, a dupe to his art.
 Like an ill-judging beauty, his colours he spread,
 And beplastered with rouge his own natural red.
 On the stage he was natural, simple, affecting ;
 It was only that when he was off he was acting.
 With no reason on earth to go out of his way,
 He turned and he varied full ten times a day.

Though secure of our hearts, yet confoundedly sick
 If they were not his own by finessing and trick :
 He cast off his friends, as a huntsman his pack,
 For he knew when he pleased he could whistle them back.
 Of praise a mere glutton, he swallowed what came,
 And the puff of a dunce he mistook it for fame ;
 Till his relish grown callous almost to disease,
 Who peppered the highest was surest to please.
 But let us be candid and speak out our mind,
 If dunces applauded he paid them in kind.
 Ye Kenricks, ye Kellys and Woodfalls so grave,
 What a commerce was yours, while you got and you gave !
 How did Grub Street re-echo the shouts that you raised,
 While he was be-Rosciused, and you were be-praised !
 But peace to his spirit ! wherever it flies,
 To act as an angel and mix with the skies.
 Those poets who owe their best fame to his skill,
 Shall still be his flatterers, go where he will :
 Old Shakespeare receive him with praise and with love,
 And Beaumonts and Bens by his Kellys above.”

I have little doubt that in the epitaph on that supreme egotist, Cumberland, there is double-edged irony in the suggestion that the faultlessness of the characters of his drama is due to their single original being himself :—

“ Here Cumberland lies, having acted his parts,
 The Terence of England, the mender of hearts ;
 A flattering painter who made it his care
 To draw men as they ought to be, not as they are.
 His gallants are faultless, his women divine,
 And Comedy wonders at being so fine.
 Like a Tragedy Queen he has dizen'd her out,
 Or rather like Tragedy giving a rout.
 His fools have their follies so lost in a crowd
 Of virtues and feelings that Folly grows proud ;
 And coxcombs, alike in their failings alone,
 Adopting his portraits, are pleased with their own.
 Say, where has our poet this malady caught ?
 Or wherefore his characters thus without fault ?

Say, was it that vainly directing his view
To find out men's virtues, and finding them few,
Quite sick of pursuing each troublesome elf,
He grew lazy at last, and drew from himself."

Retaliation, said Scott, "had the effect of placing the author on a more equal footing with his society than he had ever before assumed." He had been the anvil long enough.

"Gin ye're an anvil, haud ye still :
Gin ye're a hammer, smite yer fill."

He had held still long enough. "*Semper ego auditor tantum?*" Satire was not his forte, as it was Juvenal's and as it was Pope's, but even this species of writing he could attempt with success, and his success, as Scott suggests, would have won him if he had lived the peace secured through proving yourself prepared for war.

As, however, he did not live even to finish the poem, the effect of its circulation in an unfinished state was, according to Horace Walpole, to estrange his friends and so make more miserable his last lonely hours. "His numerous friends," writes Walpole to Mason, "neglected him shamefully at last, as if they had no business with him when it was too serious to laugh. He had lately written epitaphs for them all, some of which hurt, and perhaps made them not sorry that his own was the first necessary." "There is nothing," says Goethe, "by which men display their character so much as in what they consider ridiculous," and that this "waterfly," Walpole, should see nothing but the ridiculous in Goldsmith is conclusive rather of his own absurdity than the poet's.

But there probably was ground for Walpole's

suggestion that *Retaliation* estranged some of Goldsmith's friends at a time that he would most of all feel the estrangement. Being the most loving and sympathetic of men himself, he yearned most of all for love and sympathy, and most of all now when he was quite broken in health, in spirits and in fortune. At the opening of his first poem, *The Traveller*, he contrasts wistfully his brother's happy home with his own homelessness; in the middle of *The Deserted Village* he pictures plaintively as not for him an autumn rest from toil and ease from care and shelter from the wasting worries of the world :

“To husband out life's taper at the close
And keep the flame from wasting by repose.”

But now he realises not only that there shall be no such autumn for him, but that for him there will be no autumn. He was to drop in mid-furrow, broken down by the burden and heat of the day, by harassing care, and most of all by the remorse of the thought that it was his own reckless past which had at last overtaken him, brought down his strength in his journey and shortened his days. For he had now become conscious that his days were shortened. He asked Percy, who was his own age, to be his biographer, dictating to him for this purpose some of the incidents of his life, and committing to his care much biographical manuscript material. He tried to sell the lease of his Temple chambers and he told the farmer with whom he lodged at Edgware that he had given up London as a permanent place of residence. If he were making at last—not mere resolutions—but genuine attempts to retrench and reform—to live a quiet life of regular work, drawing

upon the present to pay for the past, instead of upon the future to pay for the present—it was too late now. The hand of death was upon him, roughly as in arrest, not with the gentleness he describes in the beautiful line Sir Joshua Reynolds has illustrated in a beautiful picture:—

“Sinks to the grave with unperceived decay,
While Resignation gently slopes the way.”

There is a well-known passage from Sir William Temple's *Miscellanea* which seems to have haunted Goldsmith, since he quotes it more than once in his essays and even puts it into the mouth of Croaker in his *Good-Natured Man*—“When all is done, human life is, at the greatest and best, but like a froward child that must be played with and humoured a little to keep it quiet till it falls asleep, and then the care is over.” But life is like a child also which its mother in the morning clothes with one garment after another till it is fitted for the work of the day, and in the evening, when night comes and no man can work, strips it of these garments in the reverse order in which she had donned them, one after another, till it lies down to sleep naked as it rose. But Goldsmith was called to rest in mid-day, when the many and various powers with which his mother Nature had endued him were at their fullest and finest. Having distanced all competitors as a poet, as an essayist, and as a novelist, he had now in *She Stoops to Conquer* distanced them as a dramatist, and had in *Retaliation* begun to find his feet in a field one would have thought the least congenial to his genius—satire. And then, when that which he had done was “but earnest of the things that he shall

do,” he dies ! The pity of it is too that these masterpieces were incidental work merely, and that the chief labour of his short life, which helped to shorten it, was the dreary drudgery of ephemeral compilation :—

“Our Townshends make speeches and I shall compile.”

CHAPTER XXV

FROM MISERY FREED

GOLDSMITH was to die, as he had lived, alone. There could, I think, have been few people in the London of that day more lonely in life than Goldsmith, in spite of, or rather because of, his sociability. His sociability came of his love of his fellows—and no one ever loved his fellows more than Goldsmith—but this love involved a thirst for reciprocal sympathy which was seldom satisfied. Cicero, who also was a sociable man, would never have said, "*Nunquam minus solus quam cum solus*," if he could have found a company as congenial to him as his own thoughts. But Goldsmith loved his kind so intensely and was therefore so intensely sociable that the most uncongenial company was dearer to him than none. But the company usually at his command in London was uncongenial. As for the Club, it was about as congenial a circle as a bull-ring, where Goldsmith had often to play the part of the wretched horse which is gored to death to the delight of the spectators. Nor was he at home in less severe London societies, where he would do what no self-respecting Englishman or Scotsman ever does—let himself go, as a child released from school lets himself go. It is little to be wondered at therefore if he usually carried back from such meetings to his lonely lodgings a sore sense of social failure.

Hence the acute loneliness of his life in London ; and his death was in keeping with it. In the spring of 1774 he finished at his lodgings in Edgware his *Animated Nature*, and was at work upon the completion of his *Grecian History*, while at the same time abridging for schools his *English History*, translating Scarron's *Comic Romance*, revising his *Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning*, and compiling a work on *Experimental Philosophy* which he had begun eight years before. Such incessant and disgusting drudgery might not itself have killed him—though it had been for years his lot—if it was to pay for daily bread, or even if it would secure him such credit as would pay for daily bread. But the bread it was to pay for had long been eaten and his credit with the booksellers, which up till now had enabled him to discount the future, was exhausted. "He was working his damndest," (if I may be pardoned for using, because of its intense expressiveness, a favourite phrase of Thackeray's,) not to keep the wolf from the door, but with the wolf at his throat.

What most of all helped to kill him, in a word, was worry. The very complaint which hurried him from Edgware to London for its relief was itself, says Davies, brought on, not by incessant sedentary drudgery merely or chiefly, but also and above all "by a continual vexation of mind arising from his involved circumstances."

In London he obtained the immediate relief he sought from his complaint but at the cost of a prostrating low, nervous fever which he insisted upon treating, against the urgent remonstrances of his medical advisers—a kindly and competent apothecary, Mr Hawes, and Dr Fordyce—with his favourite panacea,

James' powders. The doctors, on the other hand, prescribed the favourite panacea of that day—bleeding—which at least supplied the gambling excitement of a race between the patient's life and the disease as to which should be drained away first. Neither Goldsmith's nor his doctors' panacea, however, really touched the real disease, which was in the mind, "a rooted sorrow, written troubles of the brain and that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart." A fourth doctor called in, Dr Turton, at last and at the last diagnosed at the close of a sleepless week the patient's mortal trouble. "Your pulse," said Turton to the dying man, "is in greater disorder than it should be from the degree of fever which you have. Is your mind at ease?" "No ; it is not," are the last recorded words of Goldsmith.

His death, even at the early age of forty-five, you cannot regret as it was the only happy issue out of all his troubles :—

"O, let him pass ! he hates him much
That would upon the rack of this tough world
Stretch him out longer."

But if no one can grudge the poor poet his deliverance by death, no one either can help being pained by the circumstances of this deliverance. There never was a human soul, I say again, that loved more or craved more for love than Goldsmith, while Johnson's Levett himself had not ministered more often or more sympathetically to hopeless anguish or to lonely want :—

"In misery's darkest caverns known,
His ready help was ever nigh,
Where hopeless anguish poured his groan,
And lonely want retired to die."

But he dies himself alone in hopeless anguish and, I might almost say, *of* its hopelessness. His servant, John Eyles, attended on him, and in his absence his laundress, the wife of the porter of the Temple, sat by his bedside till a hired nurse relieved them both, while the doctors paid him at intervals their professional visits. Thus attended by hirelings he dies in a little black hole of a room. "I was in his chambers in Brick Court the other day," writes Thackeray to Forster. "The bedroom is a closet without any light in it. It quite pains one to think of the kind old fellow dying off there."

And as he died, so he was buried, obscurely. Where? No man knows. Somewhere or other in the burial ground of the Temple Church. A public funeral was at first contemplated, with Burke and Reynolds, Garrick and Beauclerk, Lord Shelburne and Louth as pall-bearers; but when it was found that he died in debt all idea of it was given up. Pitt died deep in debt; Fox died deep in debt; Sheridan died deep in debt; but it occurred to no one that their indebtedness should preclude them from a public funeral or exclude them from Westminster Abbey. Goldsmith's debts were to theirs but as a drop in a bucket, while he paid in life the full penalty of a remorse which never troubled them. Yet he had still to pay in death a penalty which it occurred to no one that they should pay. You might say that he was not as great a man as Pitt, or Fox or Sheridan—though even upon that there may be two opinions—still, he was at least sufficiently great to be thought worthy of a public funeral, and if his indebtedness was to preclude him from the honour, why should their heavier and more criminal indebtedness be thought nothing of?

The truth is that, whether in life or in death, it needed little to turn the balance of respect against Goldsmith. Walpole, in writing about his death to Mason, says: "The republic of Parnassus has lost a member: Dr Goldsmith is dead of a purple fever. The poor soul had sometimes parts, though never common sense." It is the "Inspired Idiot" idea over again with the suggestion that the inspiration itself was only fitful. That was the idea of men who, because they never allowed their own minds to be seen in undress, thought such semi-nakedness in another a sign of idiocy or of poverty. It was the idea also of men who, because their own minds moved slowly, took the slip or the skip of a swift-moving mind for lameness. "Mr Walpole says that this story is a picture of Goldsmith's whole life," writes Beauclerk to Lord Charlemont. What story? May I quote it again as a picture of Goldsmith's whole life—in London? "I hope," said Lord Shelburne to Goldsmith, *apropos* a paragraph in that day's paper written by the poet, "that you mentioned nothing in it about Malagrida"—Junius' name for Lord Shelburne. "Do you know," said Goldsmith, in replying, "that I never could conceive the reason why they call you 'Malagrida,' *for* Malagrida was a very good sort of man." Here's a laughable ellipsis due to the swift movement of the speaker's mind attributed to his characteristic idiocy! Archbishop Magee in one of his letters said that his lack of a stammer made more against him in England than anything else.

Hence his debts only turned the wavering balance against Goldsmith. They would not have debarred a writer of his pre-eminence from a public funeral if there had not lurked in men's minds something of the

contempt expressed immediately after the poet's death by Walpole.

However, no lying-in-state—*splendide mendax*, to quote the profound pun of Lord Chelmsford—in Westminster Abbey would have so sincerely honoured at once the goodness and the greatness of Goldsmith as the grief of such great men as Burke and Reynolds, of such good women as the Jessamy Bride and her sister, Little Comedy, and of other women whose goodness was of the heart only. Burke upon hearing of his countryman's death burst into tears. When the news reached Reynolds in his studio he did what he had never done in the severest domestic bereavement—laid down his brush for the day.

At the request of the Jessamy Bride and her sister Goldsmith's coffin was re-opened that they might have a lock of his hair; while on the day of his funeral his staircase was crowded by wretched and characterless outcasts of the heartless London streets with whom he had been used to share his last penny.

But the friend who probably held him longest in his memory and warmest in his affection was Johnson, in part no doubt because he had been so much to the poet and done so much for him, but, in part, also because he understood him at least as well as such a solid John Bull could understand such a hare-brained Irishman. No doubt, under the exasperation of Boswell's mischievous reports of Goldsmith's splenetic speeches, Johnson would be provoked into saying harsh things of the poet, but he knew him better and therefore held him more highly than any of his other English friends, except Reynolds.

"I was glad," said Sir Joshua, "to hear Charles Fox say that *The Traveller* was one of the finest

poems in the English language." "Why," asked Langton, "were you glad? You surely had no doubt of this before?" "No," said Johnson, "the merit of *The Traveller* is so well established that Mr Fox's praise cannot augment it nor his censure diminish it." "But," rejoined Sir Joshua, "his friends may suspect they had too great a partiality for him." "Nay, sir," retorted Johnson, "*the partiality of his friends was always against Goldsmith. It was with difficulty we could give him a hearing. . . . Goldsmith was a man who, whatever he wrote, did it better than any other man could do. He deserved a place in Westminster Abbey; and every year he lived he would have deserved it better.*"

Did he, as he spoke, recall the day when he and Goldsmith visited Westminster Abbey and stood together in Poet's Corner till Johnson broke at last the silence of veneration with, "*Forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur istis*"—a line which a little later Goldsmith archly repeated, pointing to the skulls of the Jacobites gibbeted on Temple Bar, as these two sympathisers with that lost cause passed beneath its arch?

There, in Westminster Abbey, Johnson (who died solvent) lies, but not the insolvent Goldsmith—at least, however, his monument is there, inscribed with the lines of Johnson, more lasting than its marble:

*"Qui nullum fere scribendi genus
non tetigit,
Nullum quod tetigit non ornavit."*

But the worthiest memorial of a man is not "marble nor the gilded monuments of princes," nor even the "powerful rhyme" which has made him famous or

which commemorates his fame, but the very spirit of the man himself which has been transmitted through his work to other ages and countries and has been assimilated by successive generations of his readers. And in *The Vicar of Wakefield*—that novel which has appeared in so many editions and so many translations—it is the very spirit of Goldsmith himself which lives and loves and teaches others to love their kind. For Goldsmith stands alone among writers in this, that not one single drop of the overflowing bitterness of his life or of his spirit tinctures his work. No one was ever more sensitive than Goldsmith, and no one was ever more habitually and brutally snubbed and insulted, but nothing could cloud for long the inextinguishable kindliness of his nature.

All the mortifications to his child-like vanity, all the provocations of his child-like petulance, all the anger or the anguish of his sensitive soul, writhing under the iron heel of some brutal taskmaster, all melt like morning mists when his sweet and sunny nature has had time to break through. By the time he has reached his wretched home, climbed his garret stairs, sat at his lonely desk and taken up his weary pen, all, all are gone, forgiven and forgotten for ever. Hence it is the disembodied and purified spirit of Goldsmith, with all that is of the earth earthy fallen from him and only the divine remaining, which looks out at you through his works—guileless as a child, playful as a boy, tender as a woman, wearing his man's "wisdom lightly like the fruit which in our winter woodland looks a flower," surely one of

"the sweetest souls
That ever looked with human eyes."

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